LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

beginning in October **Amazing** Fact and Science Fiction Stories:

A NEW EDITORIAL POLICY

NEW DESIGN!

AMAZING — the world's first science-fiction magazine — takes another stride forward. In addition to top-rate s-f stories, it will now bring its readers fascinating factual articles as well, written in language everyone can understand. And—

AMAZING will be coming off the press on a better paper stock for easier readability. There'll be top-notch art work to please the eye, too. All in all, we think AMAZING's many readers will be pleased over the changes starting in the October issue. And AMAZING is still only 35¢—the best buy in science-fiction reading today!

Be sure to get your copy of October AMAZING today!

Now on sale at your newsstand—only 35¢

FANTASTIC, Stories of Imagination, Vol. 9, No. 10. October, 1960, is published monthly by Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, William B. Ziff, Chairman of the Board (1946-1953) at 434 South Wabash Avenue, Chicago 5, Illinois. Second-class postage paid at Chicago, Illinois and at additional mailing offices. Subscription rates: U. S. and possessions and Canada $3.50 for 12 issues; Pan American Union Countries $4.00; all other foreign countries $4.50.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Powers to overcome sickness! Means to escape poverty! Knowledge to bring happiness and peace of mind! Skill and genius to create a civilization which we still copy today! These are only some of the accomplishments of the ancient Egyptians.

Above and beyond these physical achievements was the secret wisdom possessed by the Egyptian mystery schools. In these centers of learning men and women were taught the laws of life and how to master them. With this mastery they were able to shape their destinies as they wished them to be. It takes no greater mental effort to *achieve results* when you know how. Successful living is the oldest art in the world. It consists of developing *initiative, foresight* and the ability to combine experiences into new and workable ideas.

These laws operate as unfailingly as the laws which govern the sun, moon and planets. They were discovered centuries ago by certain wise men of Egypt, and preserved down through the ages by the Rosicrucians.

The Rosicrucians
(AMORC)
SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA, U. S. A.

Time has since crumbled Egypt's walls, but it couldn't destroy this formula for the control of life. In your hands, this knowledge could alter the entire course of your affairs.

The Rosicrucians offer to you—if you have the courage to break away from limited forms of thinking—these same simply expressed truths of life which have led thousands to a joyous method of better living.

Let This FREE Book Help You

Learn how you may share the private instructions of The Rosicrucians, a non-profit fraternity of men and women whose influence extends into every land. Let this be the turning point in *your* life! For your copy of *"The Mastery of Life"* use the coupon below or write to Scribe A.F.S.

Scribe A.F.S.
The Rosicrucians (AMORC)
San Jose, California, U.S.A.

Please send me, without obligation, my copy of *"The Mastery of Life"* which explains how I may receive and use your intelligent and age-old method for attaining mastership of life.

Name.....

Address.....

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fantastic

Stories of Imagination

OCTOBER 1960

Volume 9 Number 10

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

Publisher
MICHAEL MICHAELSON

Editorial Director
NORMAN M. LOBSENZ

Editor
CELE GOLDSMITH

NOVELET

THE SEATS OF HELL
By Gordon R. Dickson 6

SHORT STORIES

A BONE TO PICK
By Phyllis Gotlieb 48

THE FURIES OF ZHAHNOOR
By H. B. Fyfe 72

STATUS QUAINT
By Jack Sharkey 89

WOMAN ON FIRE
By Edward Ludwig 106

A HUSBAND'S SHARE
By David R. Bunch 117

FEATURES

EDITORIAL 5

ACCORDING TO YOU 121

COMING NEXT MONTH 47

Cover: LEO SUMMERS

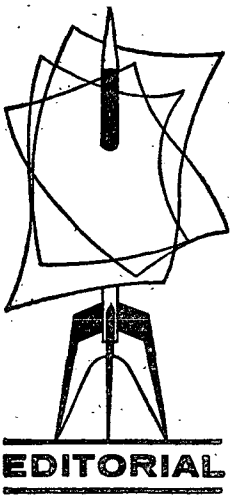
*

ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY, One Park Avenue, New York 16, New York. William Ziff, President; W. Bradford Briggs, Executive Vice President; Michael Michaelson, Vice President and Circulation Director; H. B. Sarbin, Vice President; J. Leonard O'Donnell, Treasurer.

*

Copyright © 1960 by Ziff-Davis Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



IF ANY GROUP of people can lay claim to being experts on the solar system, it is the staff of the Hayden Planetarium, at New York City's American Museum of Natural History. So when they announce the results of a 20-month survey to choose the seven wonders of the Universe, we sit up and pay attention. According to Thomas D. Nicholson, chief astronomer at the Planetarium, there was unanimous agreement on only one celestial object—and we'll tell you which one after you've had a chance to guess.

Here, then, are the Seven Wonders of the Universe (not in any special order of rank): 1—The rings of Saturn; 2—The constellation Orion; 3—The moon; 4—The Crab Nebula; 5—The globular cluster of Hercules; 6—The Milky Way; 7—The Andromeda Galaxy.

Now, that one "wonder" about which there was no disagreement was—the moon! Reasons: "it is in a special class all by itself—it is the most prominent body in our night sky, and is unique for its peculiar rates of rotation and revolution."

* * * * *

One of the accepted conventions of space-flight stories has been the "controlled narrow beam" which somehow manages to carry messages across the parsecs. This tight beam has also been one of the sf stereotypes most pooh-poohed by the purists. Therefore it gives us pleasure to report that just such a beam has now been produced (so far only experimentally) by scientists. Their device is called an optical maser ("Microwave Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation").

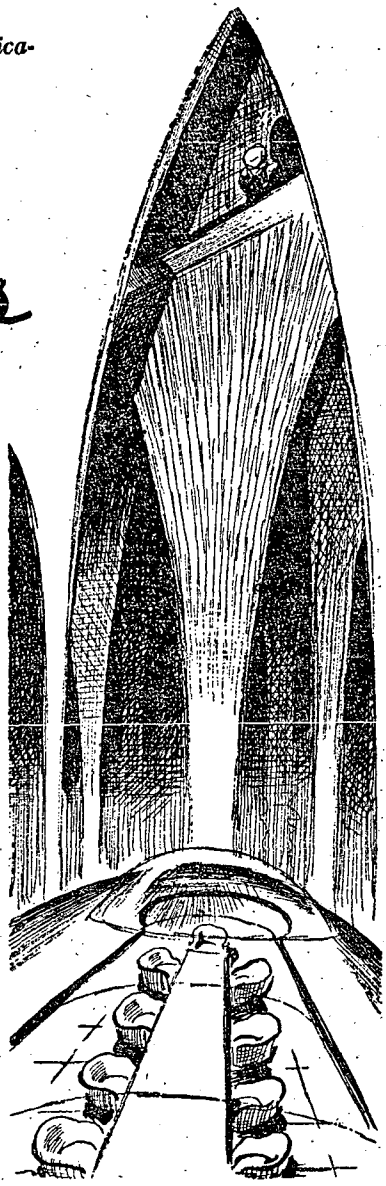
In ordinary light, molecules give off their rays singly. The maser forces the molecules to phase their radiation into a single frequency. The beam that results illuminates only a single square inch at a distance of several miles. This ability to focus sharply on distant objects, combined with the ability to be modulated by signals, could make the optical maser the forerunner of true interplanetary communication.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In the Hall of the Dead Bart Dybig screamed an oath at the monstrous figure that beckoned him . . . at the grotesque caricature of a smile . . . at the shackles and iron collar that branded him forever as a slave of . . .

The Seats of Hell

By GORDON R. DICKSON



ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

"—The Seats of Hell," the drunken young Englishman with the straw-colored hair was saying. "You never heard of them?"

"No," said Bart Dybig. He was watching his own square-knuckled rock of a fist enclosing his whisky glass. He lifted the glass, drained it, and stood up from the bar. "I've got to meet someone."

He went off down the bar. Behind him he could hear the Englishman, Peter Toupil, saying something more. But he did not bother to puzzle out what it was. Funny about the English, Bart thought, with his hand on the door. They could turn out some of the best people you could ever

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hope to meet. And then, as if in compensation, they would occasionally produce someone like Peter. . . .

Bart stepped through the door of the bar, into the asphalt street. The South Pacific sunlight struck him like a blow as he turned right toward the market. He did not particularly want to go to the market, but it was the only place on the island where a man might occupy his time if he did not want to drink, make love, or sleep. To his left, over the tops of the low buildings as he went, the greenly forested cones of The Greater and The Lesser, the two extinct volcanoes that had made the island of Nahneeni out of their own molten interiors, looked down on him and on the baking street and buildings. It was near noon.

A few of the local people ceased their chatter of French as he passed, to stare at him. He paid no obvious attention to their looks. He was used to being stared at. At the same time, inside him, he felt the impact of their eyes like burning points of light against him. This trip was another failure.

He had thought that, as a tourist he would have been lost, lumped in with the other tourists, indistinguishable. It had not worked out that way. In San Francisco, before the boat sailed —in Hawaii, where they had made their first stop—on the boat with other passengers like Peter Toupil, he had already been recognised and set apart in others' minds as something different.

—Admit it, he told himself bitterly, pacing down the main street of Nahneeni's only decent town, you're a freak.

It was a cruel joke of fate that had been played on him. Nature had seen fit to give Barton Louis Dybig a good mind and a sensitive soul. Then, with razor-sharp humor, it had placed these attributes inside a body that might have been the envy of a caveman, back when the world was young. Even now, walking down the street dressed in a white suit purposely cut too loose for him, Bart was impressive enough to gather glances. He was not an exceptionally big man—he stood about five feet ten. Nor was he unusually wide-shouldered or bunchy-armed. But his face with its heavy bones was like the face of some ancient savage, crudely hacked from granite. His thick fingers and wide hands were like paws emerging from the white coatsleeves. And the peculiar balance with which he walked was like a banner proclaiming the power of his flesh.

It had always been like this. No clothes Bart had ever found, no mannerisms—no stooping of shoulders, shuffling of the feet,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

loosening of the belt, could hide the message of his appearance. Yet, bad as it was even then, Bart often silently thanked the first inventors of clothing. If he was impressive clothed, he was overwhelming stripped. Without undershirt, shirt and suitcoat to hide the fact, his upper body revealed itself like an anatomical drawing. Great flat, thick bands and slabs of muscle sculptured his chest and flowed into his shoulders and arms; each one unhidden by fat and distinct from its neighbors. Nor was their appearance an illusion.

At twelve, young Bart had bent horseshoes and torn telephone books for the amusement of his friends. And then, one day he had discovered that it no longer amused them. He had gone a little too far in the matter of being stronger than his friends; and he began then, for the first time, to taste the loneliness that the fourteen years that had followed had brought him in full measure.

Now, thinking of it, he saw a woman carrying a child, both wrapped in the same flowered robe, shrink back from him into a doorway. And he knew it was his savage mask of a face, reflecting his inner sorrow in a scowl. He forced himself to smile at her, but she drew back even farther, and he stalked on alone.

The market was all but deserted as he entered it. The thatched roofs threw light shadow on the open booths and the piles of fruit and produce displayed in them. But the proprietors of the booths—generally women, children, or old men—were gathered in lounging groups apart from their stock.

There were only two other obvious non-natives moving among the booths. They were a short, somewhat stocky man in a mustache and some sort of French-looking uniform, and a slim auburn-headed girl in a thin summer dress that had all the simplicity and elegance of great expense and high fashion. For a moment, as she turned to look at something in the booth by which the two were passing, the girl's glance crossed the row of booths between them and met Bart's; and he had time to see both that she was very beautiful and that her brown eyes caught at his for a second with a strange and almost desperate look. Then the officer, or whatever he was, beside her had said something and she turned away as they moved on. Without knowing quite what good it would do to do so, Bart moved off after them.

He followed, at a little distance, down the double row of booths to its end, keeping them in sight on its far side. As he rounded the far end, they also did so from their side, turning toward him. Just at that moment,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the officer turned toward the end booth they had just passed, and Bart found himself once more face to face with the girl.

For a second he thought she was about to say something—something urgent. And then her glance went by him; and her eyes widened in a glance at something behind him that brought a sudden twist of sick horror to her features. Bart checked in midstride and spun around.

Behind him, and about fifteen feet away in the shadow of the end booth of another row, a man squatted, surrounded by natives, who were standing back at some little distance so that Bart saw it all clearly. The man was dressed in soiled canvas trousers and an ancient flowered shirt, open at the neck to reveal a squat, bronze throat. In his thick hands he held one of the white gulls from the sea—and he was torturing the bird by bending its wings back. As he looked, Bart heard the bird cry out hoarsely.

The market wavered around Bart, like a scene viewed through heatwaves. A great hand seemed to reach into him to seize and turn his stomach. And before he realized what he was doing, he was striding toward the man.

"Stop that!" he said, thickly, halting over the native. He had spoken English, unthinkingly, but the other either knew that language or Bart's tone was clear enough. He tilted his face upward, grinning—a dish-face, blunt-boned, vaguely oriental in feature, brown and hard. With one quick movement he rose to his feet, revealing himself in his own way as much a freak as Bart. Half a head shorter than Bart, he stood, but his shoulders were wider, his upper body enormous and flat as a plank door. Grinning into Bart's face, he twitched his hands; and tore the bird apart.

Bart hit him.

—And then it was as if the whole population of the market rose like a wave about Bart, and bore him under.

It was four days later. Above Nahneeni, the air was thick and still. The early afternoon held its clammy breath like a prisoner a moment before the second of execution. And, all over the island, the hurricane shutters were being put up on the buildings.

In a whitewashed cell of the island's small, concrete-block jail, Bart clung to the bars walling him off from the corridor. A little ways down the corridor was the officer and the girl he had seen in the market. They had come, it seemed, to the jail on some other errand, and now were delaying about passing in the narrow corridor until the man talking with Bart through the bars should have finished his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hushed, private conversation.

The man in question was the U. S. Consul from a neighboring island. He was slim, nervous middle-aged man wearing a wrist-watch below one neatly-pressed white suit-coat cuff, that had an expandable gold band. The yellow metal of it flashed sullenly to Bart's eyes in the muggy air of the cells.

"—You hit too hard, Dybig," the Consul was saying. "—If the man hadn't died—" he raised his hands helplessly.

Bart's mind was a whirl with his arrest and the sudden sentencing. His paw-like hands gripped the bars, but his civilized mind still reeled under the thought that he had killed a fellow human being.

"How long?" he whispered hoarsely. The Consul shrugged wearily.

"You heard the sentence," he said. "Fifteen years. I've talked to the French Governor, here. Ordinarily we can get a suspended sentence and have you deported. But he says the local people are too worked up. You'll have to serve your sentence for a while."

"How long?" husked Bart.

"—Six months—a year. Maybe even a little longer. Who knows? Until the excitement dies down and the governor can commute your sentence and have you deported. —We'll keep trying, of course."

"I can't—" Bart's hands closed convulsively on the bars. "I can't stand being locked up a year. Let alone more—"

"You won't be locked up," The Consul took out a handkerchief and mopped his sweating forehead under the brim of his hat. "You'll be working up in the gravel pits or on the roads. It's not bad. They don't really push their prisoners here. It'll be more a matter of waiting than anything else."

"Waiting—on a chain gang—"

"Nothing so melodramatic. There'll be an armed guard, of course, but outside of that, it'll be like an easy day's labor anywhere. And, as I say, we'll keep trying—"

"You'll keep trying!" Bart leaned against the bars. "If it was you, here—"

"*I* didn't put you in there, Mr. Dybig." For the first time there was an edge in the Consul's voice. "Remember—*the man died!* What did you expect—a scolding?"

"I—God!" Bart sagged against the bars, turning his head aside. Down the corridor he saw suddenly that the girl was looking at him, and for one further time, their eyes met. In hers was that same unreadable expression of strange desperation he had seen at first. The Consul's voice brought Bart's eyes back to the man on the other side of the bars.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"—I understand you're fairly well off, back home?"

"I've got my own trucking firm. Why?" said Bart, dully.

"Just—if you've been thinking of trying a bit of bribery, don't. You'd likely spoil all our efforts to help you."

"I wasn't thinking of it," said Bart.

"I just thought I'd warn you." The Consul mopped his brow again. "Well, I'll get going. The wind'll be starting up pretty quick now, according to the weather forecast. Don't worry about the jail, here. It's hurricane proof."

"Thanks," said Bart, almost inaudibly.

"Sorry I couldn't do more," the Consul turned and went. Bart stayed where he was, still gripping the bars. A few seconds later, the officer and the girl came past. They had both testified as witnesses. Bart had learned—although he had not seen them do so, himself. On the advice of the Consul, he had pleaded guilty, and only gone briefly before the Governor and the island's two judges for sentencing in the Governor's office. Now, as the two in the corridor passed him, only inches away, neither looked in his direction. He followed them with his eyes, through the steel door at the end of the corridor, that closed with a clash behind them.

Outside, the sound of the hurricane shutters going up over the barred windows, continued. Abruptly, the light from the window to Bart's cell was shut off. His swelling hands clenched suddenly and strained at the bars they held with all the massive strength of his arms. And the bars bent.

—But not enough.

That night, during the height of the hurricane, Bart went wild. No one came to interrupt him in his frenzy; but when morning came and the blow was over, his cell was a shambles, the door to it was hanging open, askew on its hinges; and Bart himself was found in unconscious exhaustion before the heavier bars of the door that shut off the corridor of cells from the jail office. Even these were somewhat twisted and bent.

Sunk in a stupor, he neither resisted nor spoke as heavy manacles were placed on his wrists and ankles, and the two linked by a short length of chain that allowed him to walk only at a shuffle. Dazedly, he allowed himself to be prodded onto the bed of a truck with a dozen or so other, unchained, prisoners; and was trucked off along a road that wound up the side of the Greater Volcanic cone. It came at last to a camp of thatch-roofed grass huts among the trees. Here they

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

were all herded out of the truck, and his ankle-chains were taken off.

Food was served to the prisoners—bananas fried in oil and a fish stew. Bart did not eat. He remained, sunk in his own numbness, until they were once more herded on—this time on foot, up a steep foot-trail, over a hill, and down into some extensive gravel pits—a series of pock-marked in the slope of the hill.

The other prisoners had shown no eagerness to get close to him, ever since the night of the hurricane. Now, it seemed, he was not even going to be working with them. He was prodded off into a little side-pit, whose sloping gravelly walls hid him from the rest of the prisoners. He was shown sacks and a shovel; and tethered by a long chain around his waist to an iron rod sunk deep in a rock that stuck up like a monolith out of the floor of the pit. Then, they left him. Still, he dreamed. It took the sudden sound of a voice addressing him in cultivated English to snap him out of his stupor.

"Sorry to bother you," said the voice, "but you'd better shovel a little gravel, at least. Otherwise they'll be forced to take some kind of action out of sheer need to save face."

Bart looked up—and found himself staring into the face of Peter Toupil. The slim, yellow-headed young Englishman was wearing a white shirt open at the neck and suit trousers. The trousers were unpressed; and the suit coat, folded over one arm, was rumpled and stained. But Peter himself looked cheerful and more sober than Bart had ever seen him. The fog began to clear from Bart's brain.

"What are you doing here?" he said.

"I'm your partner in this digging. I hold the sacks—you shovel. Then we change about—Oh, I see!" Peter chuckled. "You mean, how'd I get *here?* Same old story. One drink too many. Only this time I did something impolite to the French Flag, in front of the Governor's house, I understand. Never did find out exactly what." He chuckled again. "Got on my high horse about principle and rights in court, and lost out on the chance to get quietly put back aboard ship as persona non grata. Got thirty days."

Slowly, Bart got to his feet. The chain clanked.

"Thirty days?" he said.

"Long enough to make me miss the boat, same as you." Peter nodded at the shovel and sacks. "Shall we fill a couple?"

Unthinkingly, Bart bent down and picked up the shovel. Peter took up a sack, and held it open. They began to work.

By the end of the first week,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bart had begun to recover from the shock. But something had happened to him in the jail that night of the hurricane. He had discovered in himself a deep, atavistic, animal hate and fury of the shackle and the cage. His wildness the night of the hurricane had not evaporated, but sunk untraceably into the deep waters of his soul changed their basic nature. Secretly, when ever Peter's back was turned in the privacy of their solitary pit, he tested the chains that linked his wrists and tied him to the boulder—and a deep red satisfaction stirred in him as he felt the links give to his grasp. When the time came, these could be broken; but with new cunning, he was content to wait until the time was right.

Meanwhile, above the primitive cauldron of his new feelings, he carried on a normal, civilized process of getting acquainted with Peter. Peter, sober, was far easier to take than Peter, drunk, he discovered. Also, there was something more to the yellow-haired young Englishman than he had suspected, Bart realised one day. It had suddenly struck Bart that in the past week he had told Peter all about himself—the fact that he was an orphan, raised by foster parents who claimed they could tell him nothing of himself—

"—Should have waited and asked again when you were older—" Peter had commented.

"They were killed when I was fifteen," Bart had scowled at the shovel in his hand. "No reason for it. It was a bright, moonlight night and Dad drove into a concrete railroad bridge abutment at sixty. They both died instantly."

"Drop too much—?"

"They didn't drink. Neither of them. I took over the trucking business."

"At fifteen?" Peter had lifted his almost invisible eyebrows.

"At fifteen. With the help of the bank. —This sack's full. Get me another."

—At the same time, it came home to Bart now, that he could remember Peter telling him nothing about the Englishman's background or past history. The night of his seventh day on the road gang, as he lay chained to his cot in one of the grass huts to which they were marched back at night, Bart made up his mind to ask. And the next day he did, bluntly.

"—I?" Peter, holding the mouth of a sack open to Bart's shovel, smiled at the gravel that was going into it. "Nothing to me worth telling. "Ordinary childhood. Bit too much of a taste for whisky—and last year I inherited a little money. Thought I'd try drinking in new places for a change."

"What was that—" Bart

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stopped and leaned for a second on his shovel, suddenly remembering. "In the bar that day—. You were asking me something about Seats of something—Seats of Hell?"

"Oh—that," said Peter, glancing at him. "One of the local legends, I suppose." His eyes rested briefly on Bart. "Something about any man around here who becomes too proud of his strength getting spirited away to be a slave to Devils."

"Why ask me about it?"

"Well, you aren't the weakest man in the world, are you?" replied Peter, meeting him eye to eye. "I thought you might have heard more about it than I had."

Bart scowled. Since the chains had been put upon him, he had ceased to make any effort to hide the savage expressions his face was capable of showing in even mild emotion.

"Something damn funny about this island," he growled.

"You can say that two or three times," agreed Peter. "Look at this, right here."

"What?" Bart glanced around the pit, and saw nothing he had not seen before.

"Gravel," said Peter. "Now where would gravel come from naturally halfway up the side of a volcano?"

"It shouldn't?" Bart frowned.

"It takes water action to make gravel by breaking up larger rocks. We're eighteen hundred feet above sea-level here, on a young—geologically speaking—volcanic island that built itself up out of the sea-bottom by pouring lava out of a hole in the earth's crust. Makes you think, doesn't it?"

"There must be some reason for it," said Bart, impatiently. He had been shoveling in one spot until he had scooped out most of the gravel within easy reach of his shovel. He took a step forward and upward, and sank his shovel into the wall of gravel at about chest height before him. His shovel plunged forward, checking itself for a second as it hit the loose rock and then all but burying itself from sight.

Bart stared. He yanked the shovel backward. It came loose, starting a little avalanche of gravel that poured down around his ankles, and was still. He found himself staring into a hole in the slope—a hole rimmed by black basaltic rock.

For a long second, there was no movement in the pit. Only the blazing sun beating down and the little sound of a few last crumbs of light gravel sliding to rest. Both men stood looking and motionless. The sun hit the black rock and seemed to be absorbed by it, but there was enough light to see into a tunnel

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

big enough for a man to walk upright and curving away up and to the left out of sight. From it came a cool breath, like the air under the forested slopes beyond the pits. It dried the sweat on Bart's face.

Suddenly he threw down his shovel and sucked in his hard belly. Seizing the now slack chain around his belly with both fists, he bent one link against the next. There was a moment's swelling breath of silence, and then the sharp sound of the chain snapping. It fell from around him, to the gravel at his feet; and with a second violent gesture he flung both arms wide. The chain that bound his wrist manacles together twanged in its breaking like a guitar string. He took a step toward the hole. Peter spoke behind him.

"You could be acting like a damn fool, you know," said Peter.

Bart turned his head. Peter stood a short ways off. He had dropped the sack he had been holding, and stood with arms folded.

Bart grunted, turned away and started toward the hole, up the slippery gravel.

"In that case, wait for me," said Peter's voice behind him. But Bart was already into the darkness of the black rock tunnel. A second later, he heard Peter's footstep on the stone behind him. Bart did not turn his head. He went on into the hole, squinting against the darkness ahead and guiding himself with one powerful hand along the right hand wall.

He had not gone more than a short distance before he found himself in complete lightlessness. He stopped and looked behind him, but he could not see even the outline of Peter against the light of the entrance. A second later, the other man ran into him from behind.

"Bart?" Peter's voice came at him eerily out of nothingness.

"Go slow," growled Bart. "I've got to feel my way." He went on again. After a while the tunnel made a sharp turn and his right hand slipped off rock into thin air.

"Hold it," he said to Peter.

He felt around himself cautiously. His fingers gradually told him that he and Peter stood at a point where the tunnel forked. He told Peter.

"Let's go left," he said, to the Englishman. Peter did not object; and they started off again.

For a short while the left fork of the tunnel seemed no different from the entrance section. Then it began to grow smaller. It pressed in upon them; and gradually it acquired a downslope that became progressively steeper.

"Hold up," said Peter's voice

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

behind him, suddenly, "— I'm slipping!" and a second later he bumped into Bart from behind. Only the strength of Bart's arms, braced against the rock walls on either side, kept them both from losing their footing. "We better go back and try that other fork."

Bart grinned humorlessly in the darkness, feeling the smooth rock underfoot.

"Try it," he suggested.

Behind him, he felt the weight of Peter's body removed; and then he heard the sound of panting and a scramble, ending in a sliding sound. He braced himself once more against the rock walls just in time before Peter's body caromed into him again.

"Too slippery in these shoes," gasped Peter. "I'll take them off—"

"It levels off ahead," interrupted Bart. "I'm not going back anyway." And he moved forward, onto the less precipitous tunnel floor he had just placed one foot on when Peter bumped into him.

"There's a blessing," murmured Peter, following him. "All the same, Bart—" he said behind Bart's shoulder. "We don't want to end up in the belly of the volcano. If you—"

Without warning, Bart's advancing foot trod suddenly on nothing at all. He never heard the end of Peter's sentence, which a second later was cut off as the Englishman behind him also walked off the edge of whatever it was. A sliding fall onto a slope too steep to brace against took the breath out of Bart's body. He shot downward, tumbling and turning. It was like being beaten to death by clubs of iron. For all his steel-hardness of body, Bart felt himself losing consciousness. He was aware of a red glow beginning to grow far below him, a waxing light beyond the edge of a cliff far below him to which he was falling with fantastic speed. But the multiple poundings made his head swim. The world reeled about him, and swallowed him, down into the black maw of unconsciousness. And he did not even remember reaching the edge of the cliff.

He awoke in hell.

He could never remember afterward just when he first returned to consciousness. It was a slow, gradual awakening that left him with the feeling that he had been unaware of his surroundings for some time—days, perhaps. Certainly the scene he opened his eyes on was not one he had just a few moments before tumbled into.

He found himself lying on a hard ledge in what appeared to be an enormous room or cavern with walls and floor cut out of unfaulted rock. He was a little above the main floor of the room, so that he could look down on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

several lower levels filled with crude wooden benches and tables, about which moved men clad only in a sort of grey-green trousers. But to call them men was to give them the benefit of naming them less brute than human.

All his life Bart had been, by reason of his freakish strength and musculature, like a giant among the pigmies of ordinary humanity. Now, here, in this cave-like scene lit by flaring, openly-burning black iron torches along the walls, he found himself at last in the society of his physical peers.

They were all shapes and sizes, moving down there below him; but there was not one naked torso among them that could not have called a gorilla 'cousin' and made the beast think twice. Great cable-muscled arms, bunched shoulders, heavy bones, were common to all of them. They ate and drank at the tables, they even moved about with the half-slouch of the anthropoid.

So savage and bestial a group were they—and they must have numbered in the several hundreds—that Bart should have felt the same kind of sudden alarm that an ordinary man might feel on finding himself suddenly thrown into a bear-pit. Instead, for reasons he could not at the time understand, his nostrils widened, a half-inarticulate growl formed in his throat and he felt the stiff hairs on the back of his neck stir and erect themselves as a red tide of savage excitement thrilled suddenly through the whole length of him.

He sat up, quickly and easily, dropping his legs over the edge of the niche in which he had been lying. A nearby wall torch flamed redly upon him and he saw that he was dressed like the rest, in the grey-green trousers, with heavy grey-green boots coming up over them. Wonderingly, he flexed his arms and stretched. He was a little stiff and heavy-limbed, like someone who has overslept; but the results of the brutal pounding he had taken in his fall before he was knocked unconscious seemed to have evaporated. Looking himself over, he could find no bruises. But this was not as unusual as the other. Since he could remember, he had never been bruised visibly.

A sudden lulling of the voices and sounds from below him attracted his attention back to the crowd on the main floor of the place. He looked down to find faces upturned to him. The men below had discovered his conscious presence; and one by one they were turning to stare at him.

Like a wave the silence and the lifted heads moved up the floor, until it reached a great, hunch-shouldered individual sitting at one end of a long table.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Slowly, his hairless skull tilted back to lift his face to Bart, and as the gleam of the naked head moved back, Bart for the first time realised that every one of the beings below was bald as well. His own hand went instinctively to his head—and felt it clean as if freshly shaven.

But the great, gargoyle face of the man at the end of the table was lifted to Bart now. A dead silence had fallen throughout the place, a silence that seemed to echo in the dark upper reaches above the torches, so profound it was. Then, hoarse and flat, and so guttural that any accent it might have had was hidden, the one at the table spoke. And his words carried as clearly as in a whispering gallery across eighty yards of distance to Bart's ears.

"You! Come down here!"

Bart grinned, and rose. He walked along the terrace below his niche, and dropped to the terrace six feet below. Steadily he approached the table.

The crowd made way for him when he reached the main floor. And as he came, the man at the head of the table stirred and rose to his own feet. He stepped out from behind the table to face Bart's approach, revealing himself a monster.

His face was like some ancient stone carving of a demon on a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ruined castle. Big-boned as he was, the bones of his head were so much bigger as to be out of proportion. His cheekbones pushed out the skin of his face like bars of wood; his nose, broken as it was, was like the prow of a boat in miniature. His lower lip drooped over a gnarled, prothagonous jaw, revealing great horse-teeth. Half a head taller than Bart, he stood; and this, even though his enormous shoulders and spine were so bent and clouted with muscle that he looked like a hunchback. His arms hung like clubs at his side, and the outsize hands at the ends of them opened and closed hungrily at Bart's coming, like the grasping claws of a crab. For the first time in his life Bart felt the growing of a coldness inside him as he continued forward, and realized into what he was walking. It took him a moment to realise that the coldness was fear, for never before had he known what it was to be physically afraid of another human being.

The sudden recognition of the emotion in him made him tense himself internally, ready for combat. And it was a good thing he did, for the half-man, half-monster waiting for him wasted no time in talk, but launched himself immediately and without warning at Bart, as soon as Bart was within half a dozen feet.

Bart found himself slammed back against a table, those huge hands snatching at his throat. All he knew about fighting was what he had read on occasion; but he remembered enough to fling up his wrists and knock the other's reaching arms apart, while dodging to one side. The other plunged past him into the table, which splintered apart under the impact. Bart took a step backward and found himself hemmed in by a solid circle of bodies, gleaming in the torchlight. Then his opponent was charging him again.

Bart sidestepped once more, and struck out with his fist. The blow was considerably harder than the one that had landed him in the island jail and it checked the other, but only for a moment. Then he was coming on again, apparently untouched.

Once more, Bart ducked those reaching arms. The pattern of battle was becoming obvious to him. It was with a bitter sort of humor that he recognised that he, who had always been stronger than any other human being he had ever met, was now having to rely on his agility to stay alive. He was a little faster than the awesome mass of bone and muscle that confronted him; and he could only hope to stay at arms length until the other started to tire. His opponent, obviously, wanted nothing but to get those monster arms around Bart and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

start squeezing. Bart ducked once more out of reach.

But the other was becoming more cunning. He paid no attention to Bart's punches, although not even his massive features were built to take the punishment fists like Bart's could hand out. Gradually his face was being pounded out of recognition. But, ignoring this, he had begun to sidle after Bart around the small circle, arms outstretched to either side, to hem the smaller man in. Well over seven feet those pole-like arms must have measured; and Bart's margin of escape became smaller and smaller, each time he slipped aside.

Nor was the man he was fighting showing the signs of tiring Bart had hoped for. Tirelessly, almost patiently, he continued to pursue Bart while the brutemen around them watched silently. Instead, Bart began to feel his own wind growing short. In desperation, he made up his mind to gamble. And the next time the other swept in on him, arms outstretched, Bart did not duck aside. Instead, he stepped straight forward, into the other's grasp; and with the full leverage of his arms, drove both fists home together, one on each side of his opponent's head.

The twin blow would have cracked the skull of an ox. And for a minute, even Bart's enemy was stunned. He checked, wavering, in the center of the ring; and blood sprang from nose, mouth and ears all at once. Incredibly, he did not go down.

—And then the moment was lost. Bart felt the great arms sweep around him, and himself caught up into their vise-like grip against the sweating, gargantuan chest of his adversary.

The arms about him closed with the slow, relentless action of a steel cold-press machine. Bart felt his spine beginning to be bent back, the breath going from his collapsing lungs. He surged against the muscles holding him, but he could not break loose. A red tide seemed to rise, fogging his eyesight; and behind it came cold fury. Fury rose, swamping him; the old, primitive centers of his brain took over as the forebrain lapsed into unconsciousness; and out of the murk emerged slowly the animal urge to kill.

He closed his own arms around the giant body opposing him, his left fingers found the wrist of his right hand and locked about it. All the abnormal strength of his body flowed up into his arms and shoulders, as he, himself, began to close his grip.

They stood, locked together. They might have been two gigantic figures carved out of marble for all the apparent movement

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they showed. And the circle about them also was silent, waiting the end. Then—slowly, almost imperceptibly—Bart felt his own grip gaining, and a faint slackening in that of his opponent. Impossible as it seemed, now that they were matched hold for hold, his own freak muscles were proving the stronger. The man he was locked with was half again his size and double his weight; but now Bart, putting the pressure on, felt the great torso collapsing, the other's grip slackening.

Then, Bart should have stopped. He had won the battle. But all the thinking part of him was drowned now in the animal instinct to kill. He heard himself growling softly in his throat and increased his pressure. . . .

"Hold it!" roared a voice in his ears. Bart scarcely heard it. "Leave off, brother!" And a stunning blow on the back of the head sent his senses suddenly swimming and his arms loosening about his opponent. Staggering, he tried to turn about to face this new enemy; and another blow sent him to the ground.

On hands and knees, he shook his head to drive the fog from his brain. As it cleared he looked up. Looming over him he saw a brown, dish-shaped, vaguely-oriental face that was not unfamiliar.

"You—!" stuttered Bart. He scrambled to his feet. "—They said I killed you—" It was the man he had seen torturing the gull, the man he had hit in the market place. Bart launched himself at the wide-shouldered little man's throat.

An instant later he found himself slammed to the ground.

"Easy, brother, easy," said the little man, conversationally, squatting beside him. "I knew what you knew about fighting eight hundred years ago and more. What were you trying to bust up old Horse, for?"

Bart wiped his hand across his lips. It came away bloody.

"He came at me." He looked at the little man sharply, and got to his feet. "I *didn't* kill you?"

"Do I look dead, brother?" the small man extended a square slab of a hand. "Chandt's the name." He had been speaking English almost without an accent, but as he mentioned his own name, it came out with a strange, almost sing-song, ring to it. "I was just part of the chain to bind you and drag you down to the Hall of The Dead here, with the rest of us. What do they call you, Brother?"

"Bart," said Bart. "Bart Dybig." He reached out with his own hand and felt the little man's catch him on the forearm. They shook hands in the ancient Roman fashion, grasping above the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wrist. "Was it your idea to do that to the bird?"

"No—I was told." Chandt's eyes rested a second shrewdly on Bart's face. "It still bothers you? What is a bird, brother? A waving of wings in the sky for a second, and then nothing. Man at least lives a season; and we here in the Hall of the Dead live forever."

"What do you mean—Hall of the Dead?" demanded Bart. "Where is this place?"

"There are many halls," said Chandt. "More than I could tell you in one rest period. More—maybe—than even I know, brother. But you—" He broke off suddenly. A high, clear note like that made by an instrument combining the finest of violins and the finest of bells, had just rung through the place. Bart saw them all around him—even the brutish Horse, now struggling back to consciousness and his feet—turning to look at him. "That's for you," said Chandt, sharply. "Come on."

He led Bart back to the shadows at a far end of the hall. They mounted a flight of stone steps and came into what appeared to be a dressing room. From one of these Chandt extracted a long-sleeved upper garment of the same grey-green cloth as the trousers; and a heavy padded collar, with heavy hooks protruding from it in back and what looked like a metal pipe about eight inches in diameter and ten in length dangling from a chain in front. Chandt threw the collar over Bart's head, as soon as Bart had the tunic on.

"Put your hands in the tube," he said. Wondering, Bart obeyed. Chandt led him to the back of the dressing room, to a tall metal door. As they approached the door, it swung open, revealing a paved space beyond lit not by torches, but by some clear, light that was not daylight. "See you later, brother."

He shoved Bart through the door. Bemused, Bart took a step forward, and found himself face to face with the girl he had seen in the market place—and later, again, in the jail.

The door slammed to with a clash of metal behind him. At the same time he felt clamps inside the pipe snap shut upon his wrists, trapping them, helpless, inside a sort of double handcuff.

At the first bite of the handcuffs on his flesh, Bart checked. He stood brace-legged and saw the girl shrink back. From this he guessed the look of savagery upon his own face. But though she shrank from him, she did not actually retreat.

"Please—" she said. "Come with me."

Her voice betrayed only the slightest flavor of French. Other

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

than that, her accent was as English as Peter's had been.

"Why?" snarled Bart.

"Please," she said. She reached out an uncertain hand toward him, but without touching him. "If you don't, you will suffer. We all do what we have to do, down here."

She turned and walked off, glancing back at him over her shoulder. After a second, he followed.

They moved off across the paved space. Bart, glancing around, tried to decide what manner of place he had gotten into. His first and best impression of the Hall of the Dead had been that it was a cave. If that was so, what was he in now? A larger cave? Overhead the air became a white, all-encompassing area of illumination that gave no clue to what lay above it. Around them were huge buildings that stretched away one behind the other at all angles, so that it was impossible to tell whether they grew out of cavern wall, or simply stood, clear and distinct upon the pavement underfoot. The buildings themselves were of all shapes and architecture, except that they were uniformly constructed of stone; and many had a soaring, cathedral-like appearance about them.

In the distance, Bart caught a glimpse far down one of the corridors, or what ever they were, between buildings of something too far away to see, but which seemed like some great unwieldly beast tottering on two legs. He paused and would have looked more closely, but the girl caught him by the arm; and, looking down, he saw that she was beside him once more, her face urgent, under her auburn hair.

"Please!" she said.

He looked and saw they had approached the center of the area of pavement, and that one of the blocks that composed it was now tilted up on end. She was urging him down a flight of steps. He descended. She followed, closing the pavement slab behind him, and he found they were standing in a tunnel with a single rail running through it, and on that rail a small, two seater car or cab.

She urged him into the cab; and got in herself, taking the front seat. A second later they shot forward, gathering speed as they went. The ride was a violent one through several branching tunnels, not merely right and left, but up and down; until it stopped, as suddenly as it had started, before a small, gold-colored door set in the tunnel wall.

"Come!" she said again. The hand she placed on his arm trembled; he could feel it through the cloth of his sleeve. She led him through the gold door and into a small room with what looked

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

like a marble floor, black and white, and walled with silken-appearing hangings of all colors.

Barely had they stepped through the door than a new sound reached Bart's ears and made him stop instinctively. It was a voice he heard—singing. But it was no human voice.

The Sirens who tempted Ulysses in the Grecian legend, he thought involuntarily, might have sung like the voice he heard. There were no words to the music pouring into the room about him, but the sound alone was almost too pure and sweet for the human mind to bear.

The girl was tugging at him again.

"What is it?" he whispered, awed in spite of himself.

"His Starfish!" she said. "Oh, come! Please come, without any more delays!"

She tugged him forward. Together they pushed through the hangings. But then once more he stopped. Nor could anyone have blamed him. For the sight of the two beings waiting for him there were like nothing he had ever expected to see in the world above.

Sprawled on a miniature couch with an uparching back was a stomach-twisting distortion of a human being. A sort of violet lounging robe covered a body no larger than that of a twelve year old boy's; and one fragile little hand held a small silver goblet with a red liquid in it. Above this, two pupilless blue eyes turned to stare at Bart out of a head as big as a barrel, completely hairless, and equipped with a horribly outsize smiling face with the wrinkles of a kindly grandfather. It did not stop smiling, and the upturned lips drew Bart's gaze with a hideous fascination. From the very first second, something inside him waited agonizingly for the smile to be erased. But it went on, and on.

The music had also been going on, all this time; but just then the being on the couch lifted his goblet, and the voice stopped abruptly, as if it had been choked off. The sudden silence jerked Bart's gaze around to the other occupant of the room.

It was this creature who had been singing; and instantly, Bart understood why the girl had referred to it as 'his Starfish'. A starfish it was not; but something like a starfish must have been at one time in its ancestry.

It was about four feet tall, and it's shape was that of a conventional starfish. However, in this creature, two of the boneless appendages had become legs, two arms, and the fifth had come to house what passed for a head, although there was little to identify it as that, except a slit just

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

above the circular central body to which the limbs were attached. It was from this slit that the singing had issued.

A rapid trill came suddenly from the lips of the oversized head, causing Bart to jerk his gaze back in that direction. But a second after the starfish sang, but this time in English, and to him.

"Bartholemew Dybig!" sang the inhumanly lovely voice. "This is your Protector, your All-Father, your Keeper, who has been waiting for you. Now, your All-Father needs you to carry him on a trip of inspection. Oh, thank—give thanks to the All-Father, who finds you occupation!"

Bart stared, and then wheeling about stared at the impossible creature on the couch, who continued to smile at him. There was a rustle of hangings, and a dragging sound behind Bart. He turned quickly and saw a man dragging what looked like an upholstered basket into the room. The man had yellow hair. For a moment Bart blinked in disbelief.

"Peter!" he said.

"Hello there—" Peter glanced at him, but ducked his eyes away as if embarrassed, almost at once. "Not the best time to talk right now. Here, I'll give you a hand with this."

He had continued to drag the basket along the floor until it was beside the couch on which the so-called All-Father lay.

"Aid the All-Father into the basket seat, oh Bartholemew Dybig!" sang the starfish.

The All-Father had laid down his goblet on a small round stone pedestal by his couch; and picked a small, ridiculous-looking whip, like the toys sold at circuses. He beamed at Bart. Bart felt himself washed by a sudden surge of anger. He folded his arms and stood still.

"Bart! Don't be a fool!" he heard Peter hiss in his ear. He ignored the man, keeping his eyes fixed on the pupilless blue eyes of the All-Father. The great head smiled ceaselessly back at him. For a long second nothing seemed to happen; and then, unexpectedly, Bart felt a clammy sensation about his feet and ankles, and glanced down.

The floor about his feet had become viscous. More than that, it had become alive. Like some hungry jelly, it was sucking itself up about his feet, crawling up his ankles. It's touch was like the touch of something dead, yet avid for some meat cleaner than itself. Shuddering instinctively, he jerked away from it—but his feet did not move. Already it had him gripped, rooted to the spot. It was creeping up around his knees.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He snarled like a wild animal, fighting it instinctively with all the freak strength of his body. But the creeping life of the floor continued to rise, suckingly; and through the haze of his own sweat he could see the All-Father, still smiling at him.

It was around his waist now, and now his chest. It had caught and imprisoned his arms and it laid its first cold, sticky touch on his naked throat. *It will smother me,* was the thought that rose to the surface of his mind; and with it, suddenly his thoughts cleared with a snap and understanding came to him.

Of course, he thought coolly, looking the great smiling face in the eye—it's hypnotism.

—And suddenly he was free. The floor underfoot was a floor again, patterned slabs of white and black rock. And still the smile of the creature on the couch did not waver. Bart smiled back—and a second later the cramp struck.

It was a great spasm of pain, a convulsion of the body that sent him rolling upon the floor, huddled over. —And then, rapidly, in swift succession, it was added to by cramps in his arms, his legs, his neck—all parts of his body. The pain was too much for any man to bear. He felt the room swim and fade about him as his tortured body fled into the refuge of unconsciousness.

—He awoke to find Peter bending over him, rubbing some life back into his arms and legs.

"Will you learn?" hissed Peter. "You can't fight him—not that way, in any case!" He helped Bart to his feet. "Come on—I'll give you a hand."

They went back to the basket, in which the All-Father was already seated. His smile washed Bart with tender forgiveness.

"This fastens to the hooks on your collar," said Peter. "Turn around."

Bart turned. Five seconds later he had become a loaded beast of burden.

The chains of a slave weigh as much as he thinks they do. The creature in the basket on Bart's back weighed no more than a hundred and twenty pounds; and the basket and collar was ideally designed to spread the load fairly upon Bart's powerful shoulders. But as he carried his master that first work period with the starfish scurrying before, and with the girl and Peter running attendance on either side; every so often a red haze would rise before Bart's gaze, so that he staggered drunkenly with fury and shame. Then, the little toy whip would flick about his ears, neither more wounding or less infuriating than the bite of a mosquito; and the sanity of his civilised mind would come to the rescue

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of his savage emotions, and he would continue to carry and obey.

It was a strange trip he carried his rider on. Through corridors, in the little railed cars, down escalators, along moving walkways that rippled behind balconies overlooking hidden depths, in and out of strange, high-ceilinged buildings. Eventually, they came out on a final balcony that overlooked a fantastic pit whose floor was easily a quarter mile below where they stood and whose further limits were lost in a haze of light. On that floor stood a blimp-shaped vessel of titanic proportions. That it was a vessel, Bart could hardly doubt, in view of the rows of windows along its sides and the transparent roofed blister amidships, through which could be faintly seen—not controls, but what seemed to be a long banqueting table set with innumerable chairs, tiny-appearing from the balcony's height.

As they stood looking down, and after a long moment of silence, Bart's ears caught the sound of a faint sigh, such as a child might have made—rapidly followed by a trilling from the lips of his rider.

"Back!" sang the starfish. "Back now to the quarters of the All-Father." And they turned away from the pit and the ship within it.

After they had returned to the room where Bart had first come upon the starfish and his rider, Bart hoped for a chance to speak to Peter, alone. But—almost as if the eternally smiling All-Father had read his mind—he was dismissed and sent back to the Hall of the Dead by himself. The little car outside the gold door took him back to where he had first boarded it, without his touching any controls—as if, in fact, it was controlled by someone somewhere else. And when he emerged once more into the area outside the Hall of The Dead, there seemed little choice but to reenter that strange den of beast-like men. In the maze of buildings around him he was free to run—but to what purpose? And his intelligent, unbrutelike mind told him that there would have been little point in the All-Father leaving him free to try and escape if there was any hope of his succeeding.

Accordingly, he strode back to the door of the Hall of The Dead. It opened before him, and he stepped inside. As it clashed shut behind him, he felt the clamps inside the pipe that held his hands, release his wrists; and saw the broad little man, Chandt, waiting for him.

"Had a busy first period, brother?" grinned Chandt, helping him off with the collar. He

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

laid the collar aside, and caught up one of Bart's fists in his own. "Ah, you're one of those who don't take to it lightly." Around the wrist he held, where the clamp had fastened it, Bart's skin was scored to a bloody wound. Chandt caught up the other hand, which was similar. "Let me bind those, brother."

As the little man wrapped strips of cloth around the wrists, Bart gazed down at him curiously.

"Why do you do this?" Bart asked, finally.

"Why?" Chandt flashed a grin up at him. "Why, I'm boss-man in the Hall here, sort of."

"Boss? Why?"

Chandt shrugged.

"I'm oldest," he said, "for one thing. Near as old as one of the Heads. Eight hundred and forty-three, give or take a few years—we didn't keep much track of birthdays, when I was born."

"Eight hundred and forty-three!" Bart's lip curled.

"Believe it or not, all one to me," said Chandt. He finished wrapping the last dressing around Bart's left wrist. "Next time don't fight the cuffs, and then they won't cut you. —Cuts can lead to poison—then they've got to amputate." He spread his hands before Bart. "Look at me!" he said. "Over eight hundred years; and nothing missing. And there won't even be, brother!"

The last words were said so grimly that Bart felt a shiver run down his back.

"What makes you so sure?" he asked curiously.

"I won't let it, brother," Chandt's eyes were as hard as flint. "The way I believe, all of me's Chandt. I'm no worm, to go crawling off in two directions when I'm cut apart. You try to take a piece of me, you'd better figure on taking all of me; because I don't aim to live as less than a man." He took a deep breath and some of the violence went out of him. "The Heads know that," he said. "They know me. I know them. We get along."

"Heads," said Bart. "You mean that—what I carried today?"

"Zonas," supplied Chandt. "They've got names like everyone else—though you'll never hear them mentioned. Come and eat, brother. You can be called back to work at any time after six hours from now—Zonas is a six hour sleeper."

He led the way to one of the tables on which a harsh red wine sat in tall metal jugs amidst loaves of bread, plates of cooked meat—beef, pork, and chicken mixed indiscriminately—and huge chunks of cheese and loaves of bread.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bart found himself ravenous. He had always been a large eater and now he found himself voracious. As he ate, he asked questions.

"—the girl?" Chandt answered. "She's been in the Hall of the Heads two years now, maybe three. Zonas'll probably keep her for handmaiding another four or five years; then she'll be sent down to us."

"Us?" Bart stopped eating.

"We get the leftovers," grinned Chandt. "When the Heads get tired of having their foreheads rubbed by the same set of dainty fingers, they send the old wench downstairs, to the Hall of The Women. We got a connecting door into it—want me to show you the way?"

"Not now," said Bart, harshly. "And Peter?"

"That his name?" Chandt grabbed a piece of pork and chewed on it reflectively with hard, white teeth worn down nearly to the gumline. "He's a new one. Came in with you, so you ought to know more about him than I do. —Though they weren't hunting *him*."

"They were hunting me?" Bart felt a cold shiver down his back.

"For a couple of years anyway. Maybe they've had their eyes on you all your life. Who knows? Hell, you're a collector's item."

"Collector's item!"

"Prize bull." Chandt swallowed the last of his pork and wiped greasy fingers across his bronze chest. "Zonas had to be high up on the table, to rate something like you—table, that's the way they rank among themselves. The higher up the table you sit when they all sit together, the more weight you swing. Zonas sits next to the Father of Fathers, who sits at the table's head."

Bart himself had finished eating. He reached across the table and caught at the little man's arm.

"How do I get out of here?" he whispered harshly.

Chandt made no effort to pull his arm away. His black eyes met Bart's thoughtfully and appraisingly.

"Like that, eh?" he murmured. "Don't you want to live forever? Light work, and no sickness, and everything taken care of—and all you can eat and drink and the best-looking women in the world delivered practically to your doorstep?"

"Tell me!" snarled Bart. His hand was closing on Chandt's wrist.

"Turn me loose," replied Chandt in a low, even voice. "You've got more strength than old Horse, but I know how to break your arm without getting up from this table. Turn me loose!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bart let go of the wrist.

"That's better." Chandt looked with interest at the marks Bart's fingers had left on his own teak-like forearm. "You'll be a boy to tangle with, someday." He looked back up at Bart. "Well, now, I'll tell you. You being you, and me being me, you came at the right time to ask me that." He stood up from the table. "Come on."

Bart rose and followed him.

Chandt led Bart back to the end of the Hall of the Dead that was opposite the metal door of the entrance. Bart had assumed that back here the hall naturally closed off. Instead, to his wonderment, he found it split up into a variety of corridors or tunnels. Chandt led him down one of these, past what appeared to be steam rooms, exercise and locker rooms, until the small man came to a bend in the tunnel. When this happened, Chandt stopped, glanced quickly in both directions, then stepped to the wall just at the bend. He leaned against one of the stone slabs that seemed to wall these tunnels. Bart could not make out exactly what he did; but suddenly the slab tilted inward and upward.

"Come on!" said Chandt sharply. Together they crawled through into darkness, and the slab closed behind them.

"Now what?" asked Bart. He heard Chandt grunt in the obscurity and then illumination from some hidden source burst on all around them. Bart blinked his eyes against the sudden light. When his vision had readjusted, he saw they stood in a tunnel identical to the one they had just left; but as empty as if it had never been used.

"This way," said Chandt. He led off. It was a strange route they followed, up and down and round about—and always by corridors and stairs that showed no sign of another living person. If it had not been for the fact that they were free of dust, Bart would have had to conclude that these passages had been forgotten for centuries.

"Who comes through here?" he asked Chandt.

"No one," said the little man, going on before. "Only the sweepers. They were spy passages once."

"Once?"

"Back when the Heads could still navigate on their own. Now, no one comes, and they think no one knows." Chandt chuckled. "But *I* remember when. I, alone."

A little further on they passed a mechanical thing composed mainly of whirring brushes, that was working down along one wall. Behind it the corridor gleamed.

"Sweeper," said Chandt briefly.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The Heads ought to ride those sort of things," growled Bart. Chandt flashed him a twisted grin.

"They can't," he said. "Time you learned something, Brother. They can't touch anything mechanical. It robs them of their power."

"Power?" said Bart. "What power?"

"Power to make people like you and I believe things. Power to make your muscles cramp, or your head imagine things that aren't so. Power to think you to death, brother—don't think they haven't got it." He paused significantly. "Tell me. Anyone watching you or listening to you, right now?"

Bart stopped suddenly; and Chandt stopped with him.

"No!" said Bart suddenly and explosively. But he had looked for a moment around him.

"That's right," said Chandt. "But some people they can hear and spy on. Only not me, brother. And not you. If they could, they'd have had an easier job getting you down here. I checked on you when I found all the trouble they were going to get you. You're like me—you're the first like me in many years. There's something about those that won't give in. They don't have the power over them they have over the rest." He stopped suddenly. They had walked some distance. He turned to the wall of the corridor behind him and again leaned against the stone. A panel tilted in; and Chandt gestured through it.

"Look—" he invited. "The Hall of The Mayflies."

Bart stepped to the opening and gazed through. He looked out and down the opening to see a small multitude of men and women; the men in the version of the grey-green uniform that he had seen Peter wearing in the All-Father's quarters, and the women in all kinds of colorful dress—most of it had a filmy, silken look, like ancient Grecian robes.

Physically, the Hall of The Mayflies was much like the Hall of The Dead; except that from where Bart was standing, he could see that an almost pathetic attempt had been made to dress it up and disguise its harsh interior. Paints had been used to brighten up the walls. The tables were not long benches, but smaller, more individual matters. Here and there, a bit of decoration, such as a woman's scarf, artistically draped, had been hung or tacked in place about table or wall. Men and women moved about, or sat at the tables.

"Mayflies," said Chandt, deep in his throat. "We live, brother. You and I, though we are dead, we may live forever. But these—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a year, two years at the most. They down there are the gaudy ones, the weak ones. A twitch of a Head's eyelid can wake them from their dreams; and the breath of a moment's anger on the part of a Head can freeze them to death."

Bart heard him with only half an ear. His eyes were busy searching the crowd below; and abruptly he found what he looked for. He lifted a finger and pointed it at Peter and the girl sitting alone together at the table.

"I want to talk to them," he said. There was no immediate answer from Chandt. He spun around to find the little man staring at him.

"Would you now?" said Chandt, softly. "And why, brother? Why?"

Bart opened his mouth and then closed it again. He could not say that from the first moment—when her brown eyes had met his in the market place—he had not been able to get her out of his mind. And Peter—. Why should they be talking together like that now? It could be that merely their work had brought them together like this, in off-duty hours; but something like jealousy kindled its sullen spark in Bart.

"He's a friend of mine," growled Bart, lamely.

"But no friend of mine," said Chandt. He paused, looking closely at Bart. "But—I'm no enemy of friendliness. Maybe later, I'll fix it so you can see him."

He let the panel drop back into position, and led off again. Bart followed, scowling and thinking. A little farther on, several corridors and a couple of levels away, Chandt stopped suddenly and opened another panel.

"Now look!" he said.

Bart stepped to the opening and looked—down into something like a rock-strewn, watery cave. It was alive with the creatures he had come to know as starfish. They lay on the rocks, they swam in the water, they moved about together, the whole scene of their gathering lit not by the flaring torches, nor yet by the strange artificial light of the world outside the halls, and the quarters of the Heads. Instead, a white, phosphorescent glow covered the ceiling and half the walls, giving the whole place an illumination like moonlight.

"The Hall of the Starfish," said Chandt. He seemed about to drop the panel back into place, but he hesitated. For a moment his voice had a touch of something different in it—something between wonder and emotion. "Have you heard one sing?"

Bart nodded.

"Today," he said. "In the place of that Head I—work for."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Chandt nodded to himself.

"The Heads made them," he said. "When—don't ask me. It was even before my time. How—don't ask me. What—." His voice ran down. "The Heads are Gods to them; and yet its the Heads who couldn't live without them, now. The Heads can't touch mechanical things without losing their powers of the mind; so the starfish do it for them. All this —" his broad hand swept out in a circle, "all of it, the starfish built. They worship, they serve, they—sing. And what do they get for it?"

"What?" asked Bart, when the little man did not answer his own question. Chandt let the panel fall heavily back into place.

"Death," said the little man softly. "They die to amuse Heads." He turned and led off once more down the corridor. Bart followed. After a few minutes, Bart caught up with him.

"Tell me something—" he began. Chandt turned on him in sudden fury.

"I'll tell you nothing!" he flared. His hands flashed up to hang, palm-upward, fingers crooked before Bart. "I could kill you now," he whispered. "Even you—I could touch you once or twice, and you'd be dead. Don't ask me questions, brother." As quickly as it appeared, the fury vanished. "Come on," he said mildly.

He led the way through several more corridors. Finally, he stopped and opened another panel. Bart looked through and down onto the ship he had seen from the balcony earlier. They were much closer above it than the time before, and he looked down into the enormously long blister on the hull, through the transparent roof of which he could see the long table with its rows of seats around them. The seats were of a size for children.

"There it is," said Chandt. "Your home and mine forever more. The table of the Heads. And the Seats of Hell."

Bart turned his head slowly to look down at the little man. Chandt's face set like rock as he gazed down through the transparent roof.

"Seats of Hell?" Bart said.

"When the Heads sit around that table all together, they can split the earth wide open and fly that ship out—that ship with you and me, the Mayflies and the Starfish, all aboard her. When they sit together around that table, anything that gets in their way burns like the tinder of Hell. This whole island above us was made when they sat around the table one day." He drew a deep breath. "And on another day they sat together and brought in topsoil, and plants, and trees and animals—and people."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Why show me all this?" said Bart, bluntly.

"Because they're not going to get away with it!" the little man whirled on him, slamming his wide chest with one hard hand. "I—Chandt! I'm no slave to them, brother. They captured me many years ago, but no living thing make's Chandt work against his will. There was a deal between us, between myself and the Father of Fathers, who I carried all these hundreds of years—if they kept me whole and uncrippled, I'd serve them; and the deal was to hold as long as the grass grew in summer!"

"What's that got to do with it?" Bart asked.

"That!" Chandt jabbed a furious forefinger at the ship below him. "You were the last to be added. They say the world's getting too mechanical for them. They've built this ship and it's ready to fly now—to eternity among the stars. In two weeks they'll load us all aboard and take off. You—and me, brother—*away from the grass!*"

Bart felt himself shaken by the fury of the little man's emotion. Chandt was half-gathered to spring, his fingers hooked, and there were tears in his eyes. He sighed suddenly and the tension went out of him.

"Come on," he said. "It's time you were getting back. I'll show you a short cut."

He was gone almost before Bart could follow, the panel sliding down as he let go of it. Bart hurried after, and found him stepping through a panel in the opposite side of corridor. Bart followed, and found they were standing by one of the little cars in a tunnel with the single rail running through it.

Chandt piled in without a word. Bart followed. Moments later, they stepped once more through the panel that let them back into the Hall of The Dead.

"You'll be called in a few minutes," said Chandt, putting a hand on Bart's arm. "But listen—I had to wait for someone like you, someone too new and too strong for the Heads to have in power yet. You and I together can do it, what nobody else can do. We can get out of here; and away from the Heads. Are you with me?"

"I'm with you," said Bart.

"Brother!" Chandt caught his forearm in the old Roman salute. Then he turned and went quickly down the corridor. Bart followed more slowly, his eyes hooded, and his mind thinking.

It was a dozen more work periods before Chandt said anything more, or anything at all came to introduce a sharp breath of freedom's hope into the unchanging underground air. Meanwhile the life to Bart be-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

came increasingly unbearable. He carried his particular Head about the subterranean world and through its many buildings. He saw great storehouses, museum-like buildings holding a plunder of the world's art. He saw tool shops and factories manned by the starfish—though his Head trilled with anger and beat him with the little whip when he got too close. And every day, he carried the creature back and forth in the Great Hall, a vast, domed interior with green and yellow striped floors and windows that reflected some fiery exterior pit which must have been a still glowing pocket of the original volcano. This place seemed to be an exercise ground for the Heads—if riding about in their baskets could be called exercise; for there were always a number of them about there, moving hither and yon and occasionally trilling across to each other.

It was here that Bart witnessed the death sentence of his Head's starfish; and for the first time realised the truth in Chandt's words about their relationship to the Heads. For no particular reason that Bart could understand, the creature in the basket on Bart's shoulders suddenly decided to have his starfish sing to all the Heads in the Great Hall. The starfish, who like Peter and the girl, was always in attendance, immediately opened its slit of a mouth and poured forth a melody which might have charmed the ears of angels. It did not charm the Heads for long. They clustered around to listen at first, but soon became restless and wandered off. After a while, the Head on Bart's shoulders forced him away, as if in a fit of pique—and without ordering the starfish to stop singing.

Abandoned, alone in the Great Hall, the starfish sang on and on, while the Heads paraded about it. Finally, Bart's Head rode him back to the Head's quarters. Bart could hear the song grow faint with distance behind them as they left.

Back at the quarters, the Head, almost petulantly, waved them out of the room. They stepped out into the little car of the monorail together; and for the first time found themselves with an opportunity to talk.

"Bart!" said Peter, wringing Bart's hand. Bart wrung back, forgetting how used he was becoming to his own strength, until he saw the other man wince. "I've been trying to get to talk to you ever since we came here. I—" suddenly he stopped, put his finger to his lips; and led them down the tunnel a short distance. There, to Bart's surprise, he activated a panel just as Chandt had done; and ush-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ered them through. When the panel was closed behind them and they found themselves in one of the deserted corridors, he leaned against a wall and sighed with relief.

"They've lost us," he said. "Feel it?"

"Feel what?" said Bart, frowning. Peter looked startledly at him.

"Doesn't the Head have a rapport with you—" Peter broke off suddenly, and his face lit up. "Of course!" he said. "That explains the chains and handcuffs! I wondered why they had to chain you human horses when they had mental control over people. You must be immune."

"Anyway, I and—" Bart broke off, suddenly cautious. "You act like you know more than just a little about all this, Peter? You and—" he turned to the girl.

"Maria Reynaud," said Peter. "My cousin, as it happens. And more important, a fellow agent."

"Agent?" said Bart. "For what?"

"Can't tell you that, laddie," said Peter. "If we don't get out of this alive, it won't make any difference; and if we do, its just as well for Maria and I you don't know. —Say hello, Maria. Least you can do."

"I said hello—a long time ago," said Maria, looking up at Bart.

"Yes," said Bart. His voice came from deep in his chest; but it was not his usual growl. "In the market place."

"I'm sorry about my part in that. I—"

"It doesn't matter," growled Bart. "The thing is to get us out of here, now."

"I'm afraid Maria and I still have a job to do," said Peter. "You've seen that ship of the Heads?"

Bart nodded.

"Maria was sent first to let herself be gathered in by the Heads just so we could find out about the starfish. The body of one of them was washed up on the shore of a Pacific island two years ago," said Peter. "Certain international powers—don't look so sullen Bart, they're ones you'd agreed with—decided to look into the matter. When we found out about the Heads, there was a furor. The Heads were too hot to handle and too dangerous to leave alone. It cost us eighteen top agents to even learn this place existed."

"Why?" asked Bart.

"Because the Heads found them out," said Peter. "Then we discovered a little device which, surgically implanted, gives Maria and I some measure of immunity to mental snooping. With it, Maria let herself be captured first, and found out about the ship. She yelled for help, and I came. But the Heads weren't, it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

seemed, interested in making any more captures. Then, Maria learned one of them was after you, so I latched on to you."

"What about the ship?" said Bart. "You don't want to let them get away, is that it?"

"That, and more than that," said Peter. "You've seen the table of the Heads, and the so-called Seats of Hell. Sitting around that table, the Heads can lift that ship by sheer mental power clear out into space. But it's hard work to go any distance, astronomically speaking, that way. So the Heads and the starfish together have come up with a warp engine."

"What's a warp engine?"

"Don't ask me, laddie," said Peter. "I'm not that much of a physical engineer. All I know is, if that engine were turned on down here, goodby ship—and goodby planet Earth. On the other hand, turn it on a few million miles out in space, and it's only goodby Earth."

Bart stared.

"You mean that?" he said at last.

"Our best scientists tell us so," said Peter. "We were working on the same sort of device ourselves. In fact, certain manifestations down here attracted our attentions to this island even before the starfish was washed up."

"Now," said Maria. "It's up to us—to destroy that engine." She looked at Bart. "We're too well protected underground here for even a nuclear blast to be sure of getting that ship before the Heads could take it up."

Bart's face set itself in grim lines. He was thinking of the little whip biting at his head and ears and of the brute-men in the Hall of The Dead—but mostly about a certain starfish who would be singing still in the Great Hall, singing itself to death.

"I've got a man I think you ought to meet," he said.

Six rest periods later, they met in one of the deserted tunnels. They made a strange group. The slim, almost fragile-looking young Englishman, the beautiful auburn-haired girl, the powerful dwarf that was Chandt, and the giant in ordinary man's shape that was Bart—his superhuman upper body, like Chandt's, revealed by the fact that they wore their rest period dress of trousers and boots alone.

"How'd you know about the tunnels?" was Chandt's first word to Peter, delivered in the tone of a challenge.

Peter extended a closed right fist, knuckles up, and then opened it. In his palm lay something that looked like a small compass.

"I'm loaded down with these

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sorts of gadgets," he said. "When I was sent, I was sent equipped."

Chandt grunted.

"And you think you can wreck the ship?" he said.

"Not the ship—only the warp engine. But they won't try to leave without it."

"And then what?" said Chandt.

"And then an international police force will move in," said Peter. "Under French authority—since this is a French island."

Chandt grunted again.

"If!" he said. "If any of us gets out. I was for leaving quietly, with Bart. The two of us had a chance. But to spoil their ship, brother—after they broke faith with me—!" The small man's black eyes glowed like hot coals.

"There's two sides to that, you know, too," said Peter. "If revenge is all you do it for, how do we know—"

"Revenge!" Chandt's voice was a warning growl. "Why do you think I swore by the grass, brother? I was born in a cloth yurt and had the bare earth for bed and mother for the first forty years of my life. And this warp engine would kill earth and grass together—!" His voice dropped, and became thoughtful. "I wish I'd known that earlier. But it's like them. They can't bear the sun and the wind, and they hate what they can't bear."

"The point is," broke in Bart, "how're we going to do it?"

"Peter has to get into the ship," said Maria. "If Peter—"

Chandt's eyes hooded. He listened to them talk for a moment, then gave a short, harsh bark of a laugh, that silenced them all. Bart turned toward him, scowling.

"Smile, brother!" said Chandt, with a hard grin. "You're a child, after all. All of you are children, compared to me. Did you think I bothered to meet with you without having all planned and ready?" He stepped to the nearby wall and opened the panel that stood there. They had met in a corridor that ran alongside and all but under the belly of the ship. The view he exposed to them showed its monster side swelling above them; and, a short distance away, an entry port and a ramp leading up and into it. A starfish was scurrying up the ramp.

"That's for you, Peter," said Chandt, pointing to the ramp. "You'll find nothing but starfish aboard there. But you'll have to find the engine yourself. I've no way of knowing where it is. The starfish won't stop you. They only work and sing—they can't fight."

"Right," said Peter, looking out through the panel. "But it can't be that easy." Again,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Chandt gave his hard grin.

"It wouldn't be," he said. "—But listen." He cocked his head.

The others listened also. But they heard nothing. The silence seemed to stretch out between them—and then, just as Bart was opening his mouth to speak, a faint distant ringing began to sound in their ears. It was not ringing like the ringing of a bell, but like the clear, high-pitched note of a fine wineglass when a finger is rubbed gently around its rim. And it grew.

"The call of the Heads!" said Chandt, in a low, fierce tone. "The call to assemble in the Great Hall." He flashed a glance at the rest of them. "Did you think I'd leave anything to chance, or to the planning of any of you, when all together you know less than I knew five hundred years ago? The Heads are calling all their slaves at once. The Mayflies are turning out. The Hall of the Dead is being emptied. It's time to go."

"They're going to board the ship!" It was Maria, crying out.

"Yes, woman!" Chandt whirled on her. "They will be all together in their strength—and their weakness. That's why we have a chance now—where otherwise, we'd have had none at all."

Bart took a step toward the little man, his rock-like fists clenching.

"Talk sense!" he said.

"I am." Chandt threw him a glance. "On the other side of the ship are the tubes—the tunnels for air, water, and fire. One leads to the surface, where it splits into little holes like you fell into, Bart, for ventilation. And that's the way out. One leads to the ocean, which is just a little below us here. And one leads to the old fires that the Heads kindled or called up long ago to build this island. If the air is shut off—the tubes interconnect to give us light and power, brother—we'll start to strangle swiftly on the fumes from below." And he looked at them with his burning black eyes.

"So?" said Bart. "And the Heads can't take the fumes?"

"Who knows?" Chandt shrugged. "But one thing I know—the Heads can control men and women—and animals, one by one. But when panic starts, when a normal thing goes mad with fear, not even the Head can control him. And if a panic should start in the Great Hall—"

He left the rest to their imaginations.

"You and I, brother," he said to Bart, "will go now and shut off the air—it's no task for weaklings. And you—" he turned to Peter, "you take your chance at the motor. If it should be possible, meet us in twenty minutes at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the air shaft; and we'll all try to make the surface. The girl—" he turned to look at Maria.

"I'm going to help Peter," said Maria, swiftly.

"Good girl," said Peter softly; and for a moment the three of them exchanged a glance that seemed to contain a secret knowledge from which Bart was excluded. Bart frowned and opened his mouth; but before he could say anything, Chandt had grabbed him by one arm and swung him around.

"Come on. Time's short!" said the little man; and took off down the corridor at the run. Peter was already slipping out through the opened panel.

Bart turned and followed Chandt.

They went at the dead run down the corridor, through a cross-route, down two levels, an through another long corridor. Without warning, Chandt checked himself and pushed open a wall panel.

"Through, brother!" he said, breathing heavily. Bart slipped through, and found himself in a great, shadowy chamber.

Chandt followed. And he led Bart still at a run through the semidarkness, around a great, unrailed pit, from which came reeking waves of almost visible heat. Then they were beyond it. They skirted another pit from which a damp air came blowing —and then they were at the edge of a tunnel mouth that rose from the floor of the place like some dragon's maw—was open for a little ways,—and then became a hole in the wall of the chamber, a hole with a monorail slanting on up a further tunnel. Little cars waited on the monorail.

"Here!" said Chandt. He had stepped through the gap between the floor tunnel's mouth and the monorail tunnel. Bart followed and felt a perceptible wind blowing. On the far side, he found Chandt beside something that had been hidden in the darkness. It was an enormous stone disc which was pivoted to be cranked across the lower opening of the air tunnel by a gear and rachet arrangement. The disc was fully twelve feet in diameter and inches thick—and the rachet was missing.

"They close this only to clean the tube—and then others have to be closed as well," said Chandt. "Where the crank is, only the starfish know. But if any two men can move it without the crank, it's you and I, brother."

The little man crawled down under the bulge of the disc, and Bart put his shoulder against the curved edge away from the opening. They pushed together, against the hundreds of pounds of dead weight.

The disc did not move. In the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

silence, Bart heard their muscles creak and the labored strain of Chandt's hard breathing. He blinked away the sweat rolling into his eyes, to sting saltily there. With the stubbornness of inanimate objects, the disc held firm—and suddenly the ready fury in Bart's soul flamed up in opposition.

He snarled aloud. A black haze seemed to come between him and the rock and strength exploded into his arms The disc stirred, it lifted—and with a sudden crash, rolled over, slamming into place across the tube.

"Well done, brother!" said Chandt, as dust settled about them. He grinned across at Bart. "It'll be only minutes now. The fumes will hit the furthest room first. Feel!" He held out his hand toward the upper opening of the tube. But Bart did not have to hold out his hand. Already he could feel the air in the chamber beginning to be sucked up past the little cars on the monorail. The current of air moving past them was steadily increasing in pressure and volume.

"Come on!" said Chandt. "This, we've earned the right to see." He ran toward a far wall, and thrust open a door. Following him, Bart discovered beyond the door, another monorail, and several of the little cars.

"Climb in," said Chandt, leading the way.

"Where to?" Bart demanded, looking down at his hard-twisted face.

"The Great Hall. Quick!"

Bart hesitated. Then, moved by that same strange stirring of the blood that had begun the night of the hurricane, and come to its first flowering when he awoke in the Hall of The Dead, he stepped into the car. A second later they were hurtling through the monorail tunnels.

It was merely moments defore Chandt stopped the car at their destination. He led the way to a small red door, and opened it. They stepped out together onto a small balcony overlooking the Great Hall. Fumes bit sulphurously at their lungs and made them cough.

They looked down on chaos. The hall was aswarm with the dying, the dead—and those who had murdered them. Who had panicked first, it was impossible to know, now. A surging, fighting mob was stampeding for the heavy main exit doors. As Bart watched, the doors swung open and the first of the mob poured out. But behind them hundreds were jammed, struggling to escape. Mayfly, Head, and man-brute, trampling and being trampled. Bart looked away, sickened.

"Come on," he said, reaching out to pull Chandt away. The little man jerked away from him

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and leaped up onto the railing of the balcony. Like a tightrope artist, he balanced there; and he beat his breast like an ape.

"Look!" he roared at the mob below. "Look up at who did this to you. I did it! I, Chandt! Look and see!"

He thumped his fists against his bare chest; and Bart saw, far below, a Head who looked—and lifted his hand in which something winked for a second before he was beaten down by the club-like arm of a basket-carrier.

Chandt fell backwards off the railing. As he caught him, Bart saw the little man's right hand was burnt off at the wrist. Chandt howled with rage; and fought to get away and leap over the railing. He was almost mindless with fury, or else Bart could not have handled him so easily. Bart dragged him back through the door, dumped him in the car, and pressed the small button that started it, hoping that the controls were set to take him back to the place where they had started.

As the car leaped forward, all the fight seemed to go out of Chandt. He collapsed on the floor of the car and lay there without moving. When they came to their destination, Bart had to all but lift him out of the car. He moved like a sleep-walker. But he followed Bart back to the air tube, up which now a young gale seemed to be blowing.

Bart looked around. But there was no sign of Peter and Maria.

"They aren't here!" he said urgently to Chandt.

"Wha'—" Chandt's voice was thick, like a drunken man's; and his eyes were glazed. But they cleared slowly as Bart's words penetrated. He shook his head. "No use," he said. "Knew it themselves. Go on, brother. Alone."

"No use!" Bart turned blazingly upon him. "What's no use? What'd you mean?" Chandt grinned weakly at him.

"Wreck the engine, they'd wreck themselves at the same time. No other way. Anybody but a big fool like you'd know that, brother."

Bart stared. Suddenly he spun about and sprinted back toward the corridor that would take him to the ship. He heard Chandt cry out behind him, but he paid no attention.

When he arrived, panting at the ship, there was no one to be seen, human or starfish, or Head. But the ship itself was canted to one side, a great gap blown out of it. Bart wasted no time hunting an entrance, but leaped twisted girders into the hole the explosion had made.

Climbing, squirming, he burrowed his way back and up. After a short distance he no longer knew where he was, but he continued to hurl himself onward.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

After a while, he broke through a bent and jammed door into a corridor.

The corridor was blocked both ways, but a ladder led up. Where he was now must have been right on the edge of the explosion. If there was anyone alive, they would be above him. He threw himself at the ladder and began to climb. After a while he came to an opening and pulled himself up through it.

He found himself in the blister of the ship, facing the table of the Heads; and a fantastic sight met his eyes. Around the head of the table, in several dozen of the chairs, were lashed and propped wounded or dying Heads, starfish—even in one chair a small rhesus monkey. And, directly in front of where Bart had emerged, the All-Father, the eternal smile still on his face, was trying to drag a half-conscious Maria to one of the two empty chairs at the top of the table.

"You!" Bart snarled. In two long strides, he was on the pair, and had scooped Maria up in his arms. The Head, tottering on his tiny legs, turned his great face up to Bart and a trill issued from his lips.

"Go to Hell!" roared Bart, turning away. But he had not made more than one step when he heard a piping voice behind him.

"Bart—Bart, my son—"

Bart spun around, Maria still in his grasp. The head was tottering toward him, arms outstretched. For the first time the smile was gone from the huge features. Sorrow cut its deep lines there, and tragedy; and tears glistened in the great eyes.

"My son—come back. Come back—"

"Stand away!" snarled Bart. "I've had enough of that father business."

But the Head took another tottering step forward.

"Bart—you are my son," the piping words in English rang on Bart's ear. "My real son—my only son. I should have told you. Sometimes it happens—as with your friend Chandt. But our sons must be put outside in the world to grow, or else they won't live."

"I don't believe it!" cried Bart, backing away in horror. The monstrous creature tottered after him.

"—Come back, son. Why do you think our minds had so little power over you? You have the strength yourself—the strength that Alokides, the Father-of-Fathers discovered in marble-white Athens, twenty-three thousand years ago. My son—"

"Stand back!" cried Bart, backing up.

"Why do you shrink from me?" wept the Head, continuing to advance. "I was a man like

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you, once. My legs were straight and long, my arms had strength in them. It's the centuries, all the centuries that have made me like this! Drop that woman—come sit in one of the seats of strength, with me. Together, we can still lift what's left of this ship out of the earth, and save ourselves. We can use these little minds about the table and lift—"

"No!" shouted Bart. He had retreated clear across the end of the blister. He felt chill panes of glass press against his shoulder blades. "Even if it's true—no! You made this place for yourself—get yourself out of it!"

Holding Maria with one hand, he snatched up one of the chairs with the other; and, turning, clubbed the glass behind him with it, smashing a wide hole in the blister. Then, holding Maria, he leaped through.

"My son—" he heard the despairing cry fade behind him as he slid, Maria in his arms, down the gentle slope of the ship's side, braking with his feet as he went. It was a dozen yards before he could halt that slide.

Stopped at last, he looked around for some entry hatch to the ship. There was none in sight, but he spotted a heavy cable dangling down toward the floor below. He worked his way toward it. Seconds after his hands closed on it, he and Maria were safely on the floor.

The fumes were thick even here, now. He coughed as he ran with Maria in his arms, staggering down the corridors and back to the chamber where he had left Chandt. When he burst into it at last, he found the little man fighting for his life against five of the brutes from the Hall of the Dead.

Bart laid down Maria and staggered into the fight. But the five were down to three by the time he got there; and between himself and Chandt the other three died quickly. Without wasting time on words, Bart turned back and lifted Maria once more in his arms. She stirred against him and moaned, half-consciously.

"Just in time, brother," croaked Chandt. He pointed to something between his back and the wall. "One car left. The others blew up the tunnel." His reddened eyes searched Bart's face as he dragged the car into the blast and lifted it onto the rails. "What ails you?"

"My father," coughed Bart. "I just found out who he was."

"In!" snapped Chandt, hoarsely. He held the car as Bart laid Maria inside, and then climbed in himself. Bart turned to hold the car by the edge of the tube so that Chandt could climb in; but Chandt delayed.

"Come on!" coughed Bart. "What're you waiting for?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Half man—half animal!" croaked Chandt, pushing his face close to Bart. "Half man—half animal, that's what you've got to look out for."

"What're you talking about?" Bart choked, wheezing.

"I'm that mixture myself. I know. If you give it a chance, brother, the animal'll run away with you. It did for me, all these centuries down here. The man in me hated it, but the animal in me—the beast life called it. It liked being a beast—"

"Will you get in!"

Chandt pulled away from his hand that reached out after the little man.

"Not me—look!" he pointed across the chamber to the door. Just inside it Bart saw a line of tiny flames spring up, waver and start to advance toward the tube. "The Heads're dying now—and without their table and their seats, they're simply taking as many as they can along to Hell. Those flames are looking—and they've got to find some one here, or they'll follow you up the tube."

"Are you crazy?" shouted Bart. "I'm not leaving you behind."

"No time—" Chandt ducked away from him. "You think I want to live like this?" He held up his seared wrist. "I'm missing a hand now—no more for me." The flames were halfway across the floor to them now, turning about and searching like small red ferrets. "So long and good luck—one thing—!" He leaned toward the car. "Was it that Head of yours said he was your father?"

Bart nodded.

"He lied," husked Chandt. "I knew your father. Now, go!" His hand chopped down on Bart's wrist; and Bart's fingers, suddenly numbed and helpless, let go of the rim of the tube. Instantly the wind took them, and they went whirling up, up, up into nothingness. The gale roared in their ears, faster and faster. The car battered and slammed against the sides of the tube, uncontrollably. Bart gathered Maria to him, protecting her with his own body as best he could. Even over the roaring of the gale, he began to hear a distant and ominous rumble, as of millions of gallons of water pouring into the furnace of the earth itself.

—And then, the world exploded.

Bart awoke to find himself swaying in the litter of an ambulance. A bearded face bent over him.

"Coming to, are you?" inquired a voice with a French accent overlaying an English one. "How you could get that close to a volcanic eruption and still survive, beats me. But then, they

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

say you tourists all have nine lives. I'd say it's true of both of you."

Bart turned his head weakly. "Both of us?" he whispered. The bearded face across from him smiled and moved aside. On the other litter of the ambulance, he saw Maria. She was conscious.

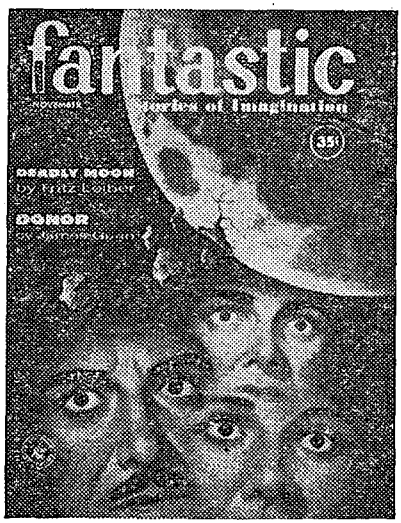
And she, also, smiled at him. But her smile was by far the more beautiful.

THE END

* * *

COMING NEXT MONTH

FRITZ LEIBER returns to Fantastic in its November issue with a lead cover story, *Deadly Moon*.

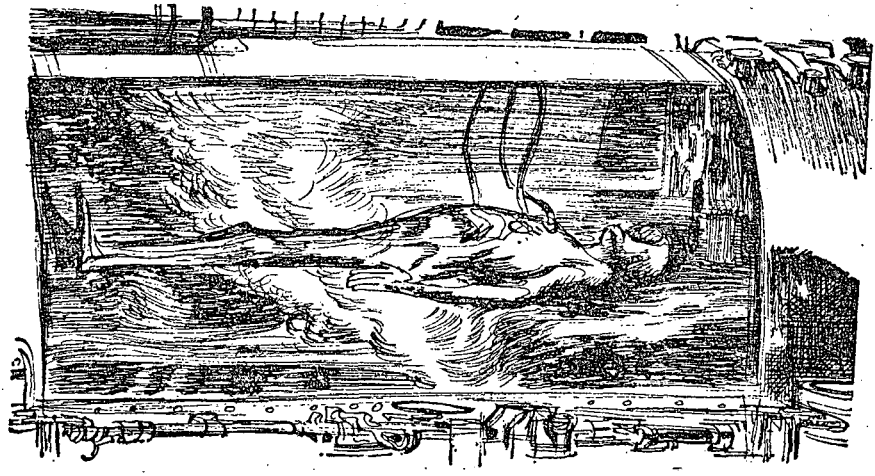


(The cover, by the way, is the brilliant Alex Schomburg's first for Fantastic.)

Also scheduled for the issue are **James Gunn's** *Donor*, a story of immortality; and a humorous fantasy by **Henry Slesar**, *Long Shot*. Not to mention other stories and all our regular features.

The November Fantastic goes on sale at your newsdealer Oct. 20.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



The Ghyrrm were a sad and noble people, even though they practiced—reluctantly—vivisection. But don't be hard on them. All they really wanted was . . .

A BONE TO PICK

By PHYLLIS GOTLIEB

THE fingers moved over his chest, pressing through the gray hairs, probing the layer of fat around the navel, delicately testing the pulses in the armpits. The tips were narrow, bone-gray, and as sensitive as antennae.

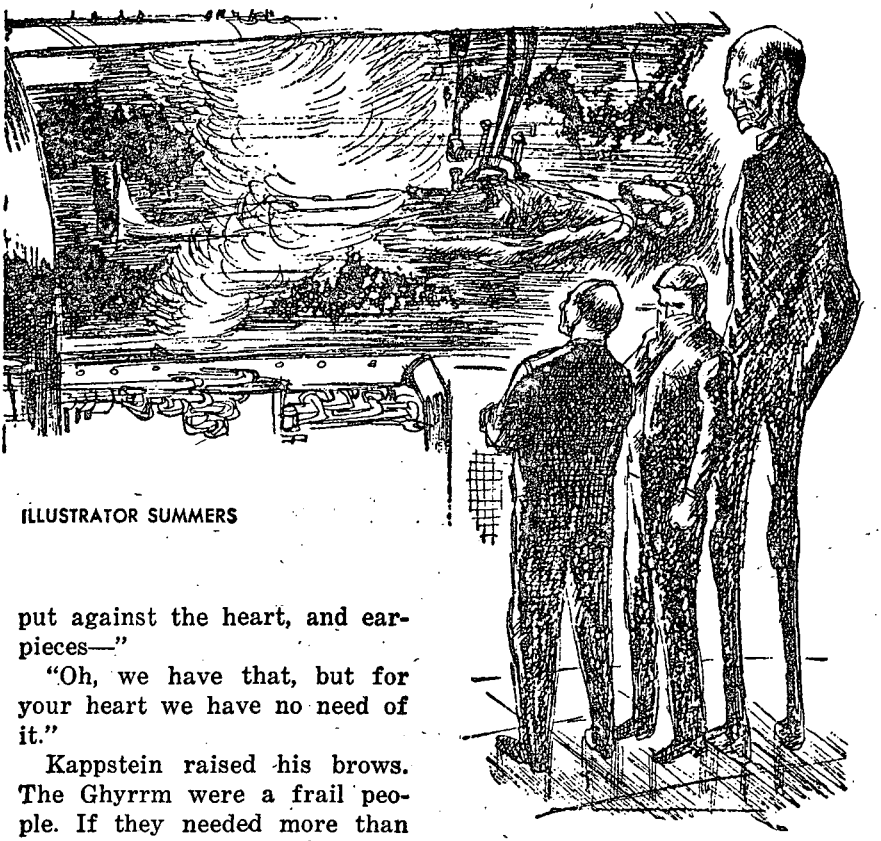
"You have only one heart," said the Ghyrr.

"It is in excellent working order," said Kappstein. "A stethoscope would help you to find out more about it."

"What is that?"

"A tube with a bell-mouth to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

put against the heart, and earpieces—"

"Oh, we have that, but for your heart we have no need of it."

Kappstein raised his brows. The Ghyrrm were a frail people. If they needed more than one heart to send blood through those tenuous bodies the hearts must be tiny, faintly beating organs indeed.

The Ghyrr set his slender instruments in racks and Kappstein put on his shirt and buttoned it.

"Your women—" the Ghyrr began.

"Not now, if you please. You understand, they are nervous? From the few Ghyrrm he had seen he would have deduced that they spent most of their lives in different states of nerves. *One long disease,* as one human life had been described. He would look it up. When he got over his own state of nerves. "We agreed, you remember, I would allow you to examine only me. We have another male in the group,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but I assure you we are physiologically similar." He hoped he had found the right words in the lingua franca.

"Perhaps later?" said the Ghyrr. He had bulging eyes, and now he half-veiled them with lids webbed with purple-red veins, and of skin so thin the huge black of his pupil showed through. Kappstein wondered if the eyes of the Ghyrr embryo could be seen through the thin belly-skin of the gravid female, as with some livebearing fishes.

"Perhaps." He tucked in his shirt-tails and pocketed his personal articles. The other watched him greedily. I must lose some weight, Kappstein thought.

The Ghyrr, who had introduced himself as Drsiilef, said, "We must have an exchange of knowledge in every sphere. If you wish, one of our people will come to your compound and allow himself to be examined in turn."

"Perhaps later," said Kappstein. He did not smile. The Ghyrr did not smile, though he had muscles that would have allowed him to do so if he had wished to express amusement in that manner. Kappstein tsked to himself and wrote in the scruffy notebook of his mind: *no humor?* Why expect it? But Kappstein expected it, and he had found it, too, on stranger planets.

As he was buttoning his jacket, the Ghyrr reached into a receptacle in the wall and pulled out a coverall of some fine wiry material like mohair, and put it on. He fastened it with magnetic clasps and accompanied Kappstein out of the room. Forcefields were mostly opaque here, and so thick and solid-looking Kappstein could never be sure from a distance that any of the walls he saw were material. His companion touched a belt-stud to let his guest through the field around the compound, and Kappstein made his way to the ship and climbed in with ease.

He found Elsie Pennycuick waiting by the lock. "How is he?" he asked.

"Hasn't moved since you left."

"I should think not," said Kappstein. He climbed another ladder and then a spiral stair slender as a corkscrew. He found Armour strapped in his bunk, lying face down, eyes closed and hands securely tied behind him. His eyes opened wide at Kappstein's approach, and his lips pulled back from his teeth. Mirza Petrov had been sitting with him, and she rose now and left without a word.

"How are you, Ken?" He began to break the seal on a sterile cartridge.

"Get it over with, get it over with!" Armour snarled. "You're

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

going to kill me, so stop that damn pretending!"

Kappstein fitted a needle into the cartridge. "This is exactly the same treatment that Sheppard used to give you."

"You're lying. You know you've poisoned it. I've seen you messing around with all that junk."

Kappstein sighed and moved over to the bunk, the needle poised awkwardly in his thick fingers. He lifted Armour's sleeve, and Armour shivered and turned his face to the wall. After one preliminary jab Kappstein managed to drive the needle home. He had learned all he knew of medicine within the last three days. He threw away the cartridge, replaced the needle in its rack, and sat down on the opposite bunk, drumming his fingers on his knees.

Minutes passed and Armour's muscles began to relax and sag a little. He turned his face towards Kappstein. His eyes blinked regularly, without expression. He ran his tongue around his lips and Kappstein squirted water into his mouth from a dropper. Then he sat down again to wait.

Armour breathed deeply once, and Kappstein said "Well, Ken, are you lucid?" He knew nothing of medicine, but something of people. He waited for the flash of cunning, the calculated blankness, and a hundred other subtle expressions on the face before him.

But Armour only said soberly, "That one was a wowser."

"It was," said Kappstein. But he made no move.

Armour said, "If you aren't going to let me up, at least wipe the sweat off my face."

Kappstein got up and began to untie him. "You can do that yourself."

Once freed, Armour sat up, rubbed his stiff limbs, and lit a cigarette. "Next time try to make me a little more comfortable, eh?"

"I hope there won't be a next time," said Kappstein, pulling out his pipe. "How did you get through psych?"

Armour drew smoke deeply and looked away. "I--ah—had a deal with Sheppard."

"What was that?"

"He arranged to be my examiner and got me through with a faked report, and I . . ."

"Yes, and you . . . ?"

"You're going to blow all this when we get back, aren't you?"

"We'll see. What was your part of the bargain?"

"I . . . knew a guy in Med-Tech, used to switch his ECG's."

Kappstein dropped his lighter. "What? You mean that damned fool has been coming out all these years with a weak heart?"

Armour said anxiously, "But

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Laz, it was his life! You knew him."

"Knew him! I played chess twenty-five years with him and never knew this. God!" Kappstein flung out his arms and his pipe hit the ceiling, "and all because of you he had to die when everything depends on him. Oh, what a fool. What fools! Where is your gain?"

"I had to get as far away from everything as I could; if I'd stayed back there they'd have shoved me in the loony bin. And Sheppard took care of me. He knew me, he used to catch me before I flew off the handle. You didn't know about that."

Kappstein shook his head. "The loony bin, as you call it, is not a prison. You are still young enough to be treated successfully."

Armour spat. "You know damn well what I have isn't curable."

But Kappstein only said equably, "That is part of the delusion."

Elsie Pennycuick stared at one and another of the ship's steel walls. "It ain't much worse than home," she said. She lived in a rented room with an African-violet, an aquarium, and a cat. "And I've got Chowder here, so I know he won't get into the fish."

"You ought to maintain the balance with a parrot," said Kappstein.

"Aquarium's got a lid." She glanced upwards, presumably in imagination through the ceiling plates, past the spire of the ship, where there was a force-field to protect them from the dust-winds of Ghre.

Kappstein had come from one of the very last of the East European ghettos, so he was used to walls; but walls here were not made of prejudice and crumbling brick. He turned the pages of the log. Sheppard had kept it previously, but he had no trouble reading it; the handwriting was as cramped and infinitesimal as his own.

Why should he feel uneasy about the Ghyrrm? They wanted medical knowledge and there was no longer a doctor in the crew, but this was nothing. It was their avidity that made him squirm. He reached for the clue in the evidence of his eyes and ears: frail? multiple heart? So they couldn't say: *his heart's in the right place,* so what? No sense of humor. What did that mean?

He looked over at Ken Armour, who was brooding into his cupped hands. Without drugs the crystal of lucidity behind those eyes was a diamond twisted in velvet. Mirza Petrov, smoking a cigarette: she had cheeks fresh as peach halves, a face as beautifully cut as an angel of Donatello's, and just as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stony. Elsie Pennycuick: with her frizzled gray hair and gold-rimmed spectacles of a style so ancient it was a matter of conjecture among the others where she had been able to obtain them, she had the air of a librarian who supplements her income knitting angora sweaters for chihauhuas. But her sense of the ridiculous was not Kappstein's own brand of *galgenhumor.*

He doodled on the margins, little games of hangman. He sensed in the Ghyrrm something more than the mere lack of humor. *Vegetarians,* the first diggers had reported. *Not many animals and nobody eats them.* So, these were not the peas-and-lentil saints of the Middle Ages. Why not be gay? *No bones . . .* well, maybe they eat the bones. Make no bones about it, this is going to be one hell of a trip. Ai, Kappstein!

The airlock signal clanged sharply and Ken slipped down the ladder. A moment later he called up, "Got anything to serve visitors?"

Kappstein swore. "Our friend said he wanted to send someone around to be examined in turn. I do not care for this."

"Just remember," said Elsie, "if you got to take their pulse you use your fingers and not your thumb, or you get your own. It's how they unmask the phoney doctor in spy stories."

"Hah, pulse! Try finding a pulse when there are three or four hearts probably the size of chickpeas!" He was deeply embarrassed. If only Sheppard hadn't died, if Ken were not sick, if the previous expedition hadn't said: Everything's wide open, go to it! *Special emphasis on medical technology.* And the expert was circling, a burst and frozen body, in permanent orbit beyond the sun of Ghre. "Well, let them in already. And Elsie, get the cat out of sight."

She was insulted. "You think he's not good enough for the visiting royalty."

Kappstein sighed. Chowder was a one-eyed, earbitten, black and orange veteran of a battle between romance and eugenics. Elsie had refused to have his parents desexed, and he was the last of a line of feline Kallikaks. He was kept on board to repel lovelice, a small Venusian infestation that ate anything organic, with poison for sauce. They were impossible to trap or even describe because they were half-transparent, and flickered into another dimension in the half-second in which one threw a shoe. Then they ate the shoe. Chowder could not see or hear very well, but in speed, sense of smell, and taste for lovelice he was incomparable in the Galaxy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I love Chowder," said Kappstein patiently. The cat had climbed into his lap. He patted it and pulled the one remaining ear, and Chowder snarled happily. "But Elsie, we did not let them examine you and Mirza because we needed you to take care of Ken, and if they find we have a lower life form handy they might get just a little, bit, greedy . . ."

Elsie snatched away the cat, just as Ken shoved his head up over the ladder.

"Can I bring them up now?"

"Them? My God! Well, all right, come along."

There were two of them in mohair coveralls, a male and a female. The Ghyrrm were evidently determined to score a point of oneupmanship. They stood blinking in the unfamiliar solidity of steel walls, their huge eyes turning jerkily from left to right.

"How do you do," said Kappstein gravely.

The male Ghyrr clicked his throat uneasily and spoke.

"I am Fambr," he said, "and this is my woman."

His woman had presumably not been taught lingua franca and remained silent. She blinked once, solemnly.

"We are pleased to have you as our guests," Kappstein said. "Would you like to see the ship?"

"We have ships," said the Ghyrr courteously, but with determination. "It is true they are small and allow us to examine only our dead neighboring worlds, but we expect to have more powerful ones soon. We also have weapons, but we are not anxious to fight wars. We want only to observe the life processes of similar creatures."

Kappstein had nothing to answer this prepared declamation. He would have examined them himself if he thought he could have faked the professional touch, but he had an idea the Ghyrrm would know what was professional.

Mirza ground out her cigarette. "There is a simple answer to this. I will let them examine me, thump my ribs or whatever they please. Then we will be out of here the sooner. Tell them I have decided that duty calls for courage, or something of the sort."

Kappstein explained this to Fambr, who brightened perceptibly, and Mirza began to let herself down the ladder.

"Thank you, Mirza," said Kappstein. "Do you want one of us with you?"

She raised her head and looked them over with faint contempt.

"No." She descended easily and landed lightly.

Fambr descended cautiously

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and raised his arms to help the woman. But her foot, groping for the second rung, slipped; she panicked and came down in a flailing arc that eluded both Fambr's and Mirza's hands. Mirza cried out as the pale hairless head struck horribly on the metal floor.

Kappstein swung his heavy body over the edge of the trap and scrambled down. He squatted beside Fambr, who was kneeling by his wife's still body. "Quickly, get one of your doctors!"

But Fambr closed his eyes and covered his face with his hands. Mirza picked up the thin wrist to feel for a pulse, and then dropped it and screamed.

Fambr's woman was dead; her body was beginning to decay before their eyes. The gray flesh quivered and turned to gray liquid that ran off the bones and puddled in the sockets of the skull, ran through the meshes of the fibre garment and grew in a pool on the floor. Then the delicate naked bones flaked and crumbled into the liquid.

Kappstein looked up once to find the horrified eyes of Ken and Elsie above him, then turned away. He was blank with shock.

He steeled himself to gently touch Fambr's shoulder. "Friend . . ."

"It is not your fault," said Fambr—but there was a terrible bitterness in his voice. "You tried to catch her . . ." He paused, trying to find in his limited, stilted vocabulary the words to express his emotions. "There is nothing to do for the dead, as you know, nothing to learn from them . . . we must all work together to try to preserve the living. That is why you are here." He touched Kappstein's hand. "I will be back."

Kappstein shivering, studied his narrow body as he descended the ladder carefully to the ground and receded beyond the compound barrier. Then he climbed up with Mirza to rejoin the others. They did not look at what was on the floor.

Elsie was huddled in her chair. "I don't understand," she quavered. "What—?"

Kappstein groped for his pipe with twitching fingers. "It was what always happens to the Ghyrrm when they die."

Vegetarians. That was no wonder. What held true for the Ghyrrm probably held true for all animal life here. Luckily not for the vegetable life, or there would be no life. But perhaps even vegetable life decayed fairly rapidly. Then the Ghyrrm must have had to learn about refrigeration in a hurry.

No bones . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Kappstein said aloud, "You see, they believe that is what happens to us as well. But because we have progressed far enough to have come from a distant star, they think we may have discovered secrets about the processes of the living body. . . ."

The airlock signal rang again, and they all shuddered. Ken went down to answer it.

"Three of them," he called up. "Think it's a war party?"

"No," said Kappstein. But he pulled himself out of his chair and went down. The three Ghyrrm whom Ken had admitted paid them not the slightest attention. With implements, probably designed for the purpose, they set about removing what was left of the body of Fambr's woman. And when that was done, they left without a word.

Whatever in the Universe could be done with powdered eggs, powdered milk, vegetable flakes, and concentrated fat, Mirza could do. She turned the omelet in the pan with a swift continuous motion, exposing a smooth yellow surface tenderly flecked with brown.

"You are a fine pilot, but you would also make a good housewife, Mirza," said Kappstein admiringly.

"I was, once," said Mirza. Kappstein raised his brows, but felt a kind of triumph. In one second, with those three words, he had learnt more of her than he had been able to elicit during the whole trip. But he dared not press the advantage, with her. He turned away.

Mirza brought the omelet over to the table and delicately cut a cross in its centre. She set a portion on each plate, excruciatingly fair about the division of crumbs and slivers. Kappstein was reminded poignantly that once such dishes had been divided into five.

"I don't know that I should feel like eating after what I have just seen," he said, and attacked his portion with appetite.

But Mirza was frowning. She always frowned while she ate, because she disapproved of the empty chatter of the dinner table, but tonight there was no empty chatter. Suddenly she brought her fists down on the table with the knife and fork still in them, and they were trembling. "Kappstein, do you realize what we have gotten ourselves into?"

"I believe so. You are thinking that we are virtually prisoners?"

"That's part of it."

"Wha?" asked Elsie with her mouth full.

"The compounds were built around the ship after we came," said Kappstein. "If we leave

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

against the wishes of the Ghyrrm and blow up their barriers with our takeoff we are bound to kill people. If we do not receive permission we must contact Gal-Fed, and Ghyrrm will be nervous (they have weapons), Gal-Fed will ask: why is all this, hoo-ha, and good-bye Ghre."

"No loss," said Elsie.

"I'm not anxious to go back," said Ken.

"No, you would not be. And we should stay for a while, if only to bring back something to justify taxpayer expenditure. But the problem is so great, that difference in the structure of animal cells, when the first expedition found nothing remarkable in the earth, soil, or atmosphere—"

"Now why is that?" Mirza asked.

Elsie laughed. "How many firsters've you been on? I've never seen one that cares anything more than: can you breathe the air? drink the water? walk on the ground? without choking, sinking in, or breaking out in blue spots."

"So," said Kappstein, "we cannot go very far without Sheppard. I am an astronomer, not a biochemist, and I don't believe the Ghyrrm will let me set up an observatory without getting something in return."

"And I am a pilot," Mirza shrugged impatiently, "and I care nothing for all that." Her eyes moved away and found the corner where Chowder was preparing to lower his savage jaws into a dish of dehydrated cat-food which had been set to soak in warm water. She turned back again with a flicker of distaste. "But I have read some history, and I know the lengths to which people have gone to make discoveries about the human body."

"Burke and Hare?" Elsie suggested.

"Yes, Burke and Hare. Nazi concentration camps with their mockery of science. The Landhover Experimental Station in the Pocket War. Other tragedies in many mouldering records. How many slaves died before Mithridates decided on the right dosage?"

Kappstein smiled a little crookedly. "We hardly know that one was true."

"Yes, but for every Mithridates who wasn't there was a madman, a despot, a murderer who was."

"What are you getting at?"

"Do you think the Ghyrrm know nothing of their physiology? They seem to have had the instruments to examine you thoroughly enough."

Kappstein asked softly, "And you are suggesting that they practice vivisection upon themselves?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I am suggesting it, and I am certain of it. Kappstein, the picture that brings to my mind is so horrible that I am sick to think of what they would do to us if they knew we did not—" she moved her hands emptily in the air.

Ken and Elsie were staring at her. With his fork Kappstein moved the last piece of omelet among the liquids on his plate and ate it. "It is not an altogether unreasonable theory."

Elsie cried, "For God's sake, Laz, how can you sit there and chew?"

"Elsie, should I climb the walls?" He leaned back and folded his hands over his belly. "We can't leave here without several consultations with the Ghyrrm, and that will mean time. We must all take our vitamins and pray."

"It's no joke, Laz," said Ken.

"I agree," said Kappstein. "If any one of us ended up at the foot of a ladder with a broken neck the rest would be in a likely way to expect the same. I would hate to have to trust to the mercies of the Ghyrrm. If they practise vivisection. And I believe the line of reasoning is plausible. But we can only be careful."

"And kill the cat," said Mirza.

"Shut up!" Kappstein roared over Elsie's outrage. "Why, Mirza?"

"Don't you see? The cat is our most vulnerable part. If we are here as long as three days, the Ghyrrm will be in and out of the ship. If the cat is shut up most of that time he will turn savage and be of no use anyway. If he is let loose the Ghyrrm will see him sooner or later. You have said yourself: the cat is a lower life form, the Ghyrrm are avid. They might see to it that we lose him. If he died as a result of an experiment—"

Elsie said in a strangled voice, "What about the lovelice?"

"You must make that choice."

Elsie picked up the cat and sat down holding him. She said intensely, "Oh, you got brains, all right, but what do you use for a heart? This mangy old beast is all I've got that thinks I'm anything, and that's not a hell of a lot. I'll do whatever Kappstein says to keep him out of the way, but damn you, I'm not going to let you kill him!"

"Nobody will kill anything," said Kappstein. He glared round through his felted brows, the more fiercely because he agreed with Mirza in private. "For now we will have to—"

The airlock clanged. Kappstein tsked; he had been going to say—have to let the Ghyrrm make the next move, and they were making it.

Ken got up. "How do you say 'Do Not Disturb' in Ghyrrski?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Kappstein rose as well. "It's all right, Ken." He followed down the ladder.

Fambr was there, as well as Drsiilef, the greedyguts who had examined Kappstein. No females, this time, probably because they were less biologically expendable. Kappstein wondered if the Ghyrrm considered the GalFed ship with its stairs and ladders a thoroughgoing menace by now.

"I would like to repeat that my colleagues and I are distressed," said Kappstein, "although I know that this is no consolation." It struck him shamefully then that he was a liar. The only distress he and his colleagues had felt was at the thought of losing their skins.

The doctor said, "If you learn something we will be more than sufficiently consoled, sir. Will you come with us?"

"One moment," said Kappstein. He turned to the others and said in their own language, "I think there is no danger here. Ken, you can come with me, so the Ghyrrm will feel they are trusted." He did not add that if there were any argument about killing the cat while he was gone he did not trust Ken to be a stable factor in it. He turned to the women, who were looking bellicose. "Remember, I trust the Ghyrrm . . ."

He was not sure what the Ghyrrm wanted him for but he had an idea that they were anxious to show him their progress, or lack of it, in the life sciences. At the compound entrance the party was joined by two other Ghyrrm, and they went along to a hangar full of aircars.

The hangar was an opaque forcefield; although forcefields were solid and gray their edges were blurred, and Kappstein always felt there was something wrong with his eyes when he tried to look at them closely. But the aircars were metal and glass, and the group rose through the roof of the hangar into what was a fair day for Ghre, eddying with occasional drifts of powdery silt that beat against the surfaces of the car with an oceanic roar. Kappstein wondered how long an aircar stood up under this barrage, and what happened on a foul day.

His companions were silent. They were not proud of their scenery and found nothing to point out during the half-hour's desolate ride over arid and windbeaten country. Had this atmosphere moulded the character of the Ghyrrm? Kappstein considered the downtrodden pyramid-builder—but the ancient Egyptian had expected something interesting after death—so did the cruel and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bloody Viking—and the Eskimo, whatever his philosophy, warmed himself with love and gaiety under the Arctic night. What elaborate pies in the sky had the Ghyrrm cooked up for themselves? Nothing based on the immortality of the body, that was certain.

They came down finally under a force-dome that evidently housed scientific installations: dreary buildings not too different from the ones Kappstein had encountered in his youth. But the first laboratory room he was shown, with its scrubbed tables and clean shelved receptacles, was far removed from the welters of spare parts and old galoshes he had known. But there were plenty of people around; the busy atmosphere was the same.

He stood looking around the room and decided to unburden himself a little.

"I believe you know that I am not a doctor," he began.

"I had deduced that," said Drsiilef. "I confess I wondered why your expedition had not sent one."

"It was unfair not to tell you this right away, but we were unwilling to disappoint you. We had a doctor with us, but he died when we were in sight of your star, and it was too late to turn back."

"This is a setback, but surely there are many, many scientists in your Federation who could help us. If you carry back a full report we may still be within reasonable sight of our goal."

"That is so," said Kappstein, sighing with the relief of his shifted burden.

But the relief lasted only as far as the next room.

"Tell me," he began. He was leaning over a railing and staring with a shuddering horrified fascination at the racked face of the victim in the tank below. "Tell me, is this subject a volunteer?"

Drsiilef hesitated for a moment, and then said, "We have volunteers occasionally, but this one is not. He is a criminal."

"I see," said Kappstein.

With an effort he turned his head. Ken, beside him, had his hands clamped rigidly on the bar of the railing, his eyes were fixed and glittering, there was a greenish cast to his face and his upper lip was beaded with sweat. Kappstein protruded a tongue to lick his own lips and found beads of moisture on the tips of his moustache hairs. He grasped Ken tightly by the arm. "Look at me," he muttered. "That is better. Keep hold of yourself, now—"

"Laz, I don't know how much more of this I can stand . . ."

"I'll try to make it short. Don't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

look round." He said to Drsiilef: "These are not the techniques commonly practised by my colleagues. You must forgive us if we are startled."

The doctor inclined his head like the popular conception of the impassive oriental. But there was something readable for once in the cast of his body that said: Man, if you have better ideas—!

Kappstein added dryly, "Although they are not entirely unknown on my world." He was shaken by an inward trembling, suddenly, and his knees were weak. But he suffered himself to be led about the place for half-an-hour longer, and he propelled Ken with him like a blind man. The dry scoured air of Ghre seemed peculiarly sweet when they came out into it at long last.

Elsie and Mirza were waiting for them near the airlock in the same attitude of armed truce in which he had left them. Ken went up to his bunk without a word, but Kappstein sat down at his lectern and drummed his fingers on his knees.

"You were right, Mirza," he said. "The Ghyrrm certainly do practise vivisection."

"I—" Elsie began, then bit her lip and said nothing.

Mirza only said calmly, "I am not surprised."

In a nervous gesture, Kappstein began to turn the pages of the log. The crew list met his eyes:

K. Armour .....Computer
L. Kappstein .....Astronomer
E. Pennycuick .....Ecologist
T. Petrov .....Pilot
M. Sheppard .....M.O.

One dead and four ignorant and fearful people full of personal horrors, rendered by the one fact quite useless for the tasks they had performed hundreds of times on weird planets of desert and howling wilderness. T. Petrov? His hand rose to correct the error, and fell back in apathy. He had been intending to take the spaceboat to one of the dead worlds and set up his equipment, but he had lost all stomach for Ghre.

He shook himself like a wet dog. What had they threatened, what had they done to him? Nothing, yet . . . He imagined himself, suddenly suspended in one of those tanks, with the wires of electrodes and thermocouples tangling about him, and shuddered. The stories of his ancestors, fears and feelings almost oceanic, beat on him like the stinging dust-tides he had passed through in the aircar. He turned the pen between his fingers and felt paralyzed.

Ken came slowly down the stairs, looking worse for wear. He sat down dispiritedly, his hands hung limply between his thighs. Elsie sat hugging herself,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and looking from one to the other.

It was Mirza who stood up with an air of decision. There was something of a glitter in her eyes, and Kappstein half rose as she went over to the small grilled door set in the opposite wall. She pulled out Chowder, who had been sleeping, and he hung in her hands limp as the kind of shabby, orangey fur-piece Elsie herself might have worn.

Mirza's hands tightened on the cat, and she looked across the room with her clear pale eyes.

"I have your permission, Kappstein?"

Elsie looked up with a start, and before he could say yes or no, she had flung herself on Mirza with a bound, screeching.

"Leggo! Don't you dare touch that cat! Kappstein!"

Ken ran to pull her off. His arms were round her shoulders, and she freed one hand to claw at him. "Strangle it, Mirza," he panted, "hur—" He broke off, yelling, because Elsie had sunk her teeth in his knuckles.

They swayed there for a moment, a writhing Laocoon-group, with the cat half suffocated in the press of their bodies, his screechings muffled, hind legs beating, and thrashing tail tangled in their leg.

"Kappstein!" Elsie howled. "Don't let them kill my cat!"

Kappstein, who had been standing thunderstruck, moved. What he lacked in athletic grace he made up in weight and strength. Gripping Ken by a shoulder, he peeled him from the struggling mass first and shoved him against the wall. Then he levered between the two women and flung hard in either direction. The cat dropped to the floor screaming. The others came up against the wall like Ken.

Kappstein stood in the middle, staring at them all in turn. He could scarcely find voice.

Ken's wild and sullen eyes faltered; between gasps he was licking at his excoriated knuckles. Mirza pushed back her tangled hair with a scratched hand and glared with eyes full of ice crystals. Elsie was cowering against the wall in a heap, trying to pull her torn blouse over her shoulder, where the skin, terribly white and soft, was marked with red lines either from Mirza's nails or Chowder's claws.

He looked down at the cat, who was smoothing his fur with a coarse ragged tongue, and whose single eye, half-slitted, burned with disdain upon his keepers. Kappstein bent to pick it up, and discovered with surprise that it was trembling. *Or perhaps it is myself . . .*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He set the creature in Elsie's lap as she sat there with her legs folded under her. She put her arms around it and looked up at him; her eyes were full of tears.

"Laz? If you have to . . . ?"

"If I have to," said Kappstein dryly, "It will be for far better reasons than have up to now been tendered."

He found a bottle of antiseptic and daubed the assorted wounds of man and beast. As he was binding Ken's hand he asked gently, "What sent you in to do battle, Ken?"

Armour licked his lips. "I'm—cats—they—they make me nervous."

Kappstein smiled sadly. Perhaps it was true, perhaps for Ken a one-eyed cat would have the evil eye, but Kappstein remembered the look on his face in the Ghyrrm laboratory. He addressed himself to the bandage, wondering why, when the skin, bones, and ligaments were formed in such a fine body with the usual sensitivity of the Creator, the mind could not have been made equally comely. But then his own reactions had been nothing to be proud of, and he was still afraid. To take the matter further, why could not the Ghyrrm have been allowed bodies of which they could learn the structure by better methods than the cruel ones they were obliged to use?

He sighed. "Do you think you need an injection, Ken?"

Armour covered his face with his hands. "If you think so, Laz," he mumbled.

Instead, Kappstein went to a cabinet where he removed a bottle of rye from a supply which Sheppard had kept for medicinal purposes only, since, in spite of the excuse of his heart condition, he had been an abstainer. He found several small glasses, half-filled them and gave one to Ken and one to Elsie. He was about to offer one to Mirza, but recollected, and said. "I believe you have said that you do not take whiskey, Mirza—so I will leave you to your dreams." And he tossed down the liquor himself.

But it was Kappstein who dreamed:

"My name is Lazarus Emmanuel Kappstein—repeat after me, I tell you!"

"M-my name is Lazarus Emmanuel Kappstein."

The hands were gripping his shoulders so tightly it seemed the nails would pierce the fabric of his shirt. He was a boy of ten, with olive skin—he had gotten his coloring from his mother—and black hair bursting from under his embroidered skullcap. The sidecurls quivered at his father's grip. The man who was holding him had dead-white

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

skin and firebrick hair. His skullcap was black and his sidecurls tight as springs; he had pale eyes and the pupils were cavernous in the shadowed room.

"If I forget these things may I lose my eyes, my tongue, my hands, my memories, and be useless in the eye of God and Man!"

O Jerusalem! *"If I forget these things . . ."*

"I will remember that my people died in the fires of Moloch, and were hung upon the crosses of the Romans, that they were massacred in Babylon, that during the Crusades they were slaughtered in Austria, in Prague, in Germany, in France, in Hungary, in Jerusalem, in Bohemia—" it had become a Hebrew litany that thundered along black halls of time and history.

"—that they were stretched on racks in Spain, murdered in Russia and Poland, butchered in the massacres of Frankfort, Rottingen, Cordoba, Vienna, Kiev . . . I will remember that my great-great-great-aunt and uncle Channah and Julius Grossbart died in the massacre of Kishinev, that my great-great-aunts Dvora and Lieba Kappstein made soap of the purest Jews-fat in Belsen, that my great-great-grandfather, Ephraim Feld, and his son Julius and his daughter Channah died in the gas chambers at Auschwitz, that my—"

"Laz, Laz!"

"Wha-what?"

"Wake up, wake up, Laz!" Armour was shaking him. "You're roaring like a Martian sandstorm!"

Kappstein sat up, he was in the ship, he was safe.

"What was the matter with you?"

He sat up in the bunk, shook himself, and yawned, "Nothing, I was having a dream."

Not a dream, a nightmare he thought he had beaten forty years before. Nevertheless, he finished the roll-call:

"—that my great-uncle, Lazarus Kappstein, was mutilated in the Landhover Station."

"What did you say?"

"Nothing." He shivered. He had suddenly discovered that he was soaked in sweat. He looked at his watch. It was 0530 hours, shiptime. "Go back to sleep, Ken."

He found another pair of pajamas and lay back in the bunk, mind still bound in the web of his dream. Those white hands, that harsh voice . . . Another hand had touched his shoulder in the night, at times.

Lazrael, you ought not to think harshly of your father. His goodness has been ruined because he has only the one idea . . .

But his mother had gotten the order of things wrong. His fath-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

er's goodness had had to grow up warped and twisted around a terrible scar. Whatever else might have contributed, he had at any rate seen his uncle, that earlier Lazarus Kappstein, come mutilated out of the Landhover Station, and the scar was a real one.

The young Lazarus, on his part, had been able to grow up without warping, without having to forgive his father for anything. That was what his mother's few whispered words had done for him. Just the same, as soon as he considered himself tall enough to pass for a man, he had sheared off the sidecurls, folded away the prayer-shawl he had only just earned the right to wear, and run away. In the end perhaps he had not been entirely unmarked by the Landhover Station.

The thing was still too close. Kappstein pushed himself out of his bunk and turned his thick ungainly body round in the confines of the cabin, searching desperately for a distraction. The bookshelf caught his eye.

All that was left of Sheppard was there, beside the empty bunk. A few medical texts in flyaway paper, printed on the Moon for SpaceMed; a few of the most recent medical journals available at the time of embarkation; several monographs on basic alien types; and a rather scruffy and snuffy miscellany from the Eighteenth Century that seemed to go well with a man who was an abstainer. His eye lit on a volume: Johnson: *Lives of the Poets*, and he reminded himself that in the eternity of a few hours before he had intended to look up a quotation. He took down the book and leafed pages towards Alexander Pope . . .

> By natural deformity or accidental distortion his vital functions were so much disordered that his life was a "long disease . . ."

This long disease. Well, here was someone who must have had something in common with the Ghyrrm. He thought about the Ghyrrm, and it seemed to him now that they had been trying to tell him something, but he was unable to bring his mind to bear on it. He read on:

> . . . extremely sensible of cold, so that he wore a kind of fur doublet under a shirt of very coarse warm linen with fine sleeves. When he rose, he was invested in bodice made of stiff canvas, being scarce able to hold himself erect till they were laced . . .

and Kappstein remembered the Ghyrrm in their stiff mohair coveralls. He remembered something else: aside from Fambr and his wife, and the doctor,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Drsiilef, *there was hardly a single Ghyrr he had met in his tour of the laboratory who did not have some kind of scar, sore, or deformation on his body.* If he had not been so distraught he would have remarked it consciously.

He closed the book with the lingering image of Alexander Pope, a dwarf who had been a giant of nastiness, a creature of a perfect malice and spite matched only by the perfect love and tolerance of his biographer. A biographer who was concerned to put down the whole truth about his subject, not forgetting that he himself was a huge pockfaced man of excruciating ugliness who rattled his cane compulsively along fence-rails and collected orange-peels.

Kappstein put away the book and went to wash his face in the basin; there he discovered himself in the mirror, skin-creased, baggy-eyed, huge tufted brows for which the anthropological term "supraorbital ridges" seemed more than descriptive. Here he was: he had been sick to his stomach, he had engaged in an idiotic melee, he had sweated with fear, he had had nightmares, and now he was beginning to be very angry.

Damn you, Kappstein! You have let a sick mind and a twisted mind break your will!

He flung the towel in the basin and began to yell at the top of his lungs:

"Get up, damn you, all of you, get up! GET UP!"

Ken tumbled out of his bunk as though he had been shot. There were cries and murmurs from the women above, and they came down barefoot with ruffled hair and hastily knotted robes.

"What happened? What's wrong? What—?"

"Nothing has happened, nothing is wrong; be calm," said Kappstein sweetly. "The Ghyrrm have not attacked."

"Then what—what are you doing?"

He was putting a pair of trousers on over his pajamas. "I am going to see what it is about the Ghyrrm that makes men cowards." He rose and surveyed them once again.

"Ken, it is true you turned green when you saw the Ghyrrm experiments—and they are horrible—but you will admit you are a textbook case of schizophrenia with paranoid delusions, is it not so? Yes, but you will be cured one day, and perhaps you will act differently. Elsie, it is true you are a single person with nothing to love or love you but a cat. Well, Elsie, I love you and would marry you if I did not already have a perfectly satisfactory wife, five children, and nine

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

grandchildren, not counting the one who was not yet born when I embarked. Don't thank me.

"You, Mirza, have troubles. I don't know what they are, but I know you must have them, if you feel constrained to wreck havoc upon a cat. But I! I!" he stabbed his chest with a stubby forefinger, "I! What has this to do with me?" He had taken the Landhover Station into account, and had decided that while it may have constituted a reason, it was no excuse.

"Why have I to sweat and puke with fear? Therefore," he bent to find his shoes and his voice was temporarily muffled, "I am going . . ." he withdrew for a moment from the labor of tying his shoelaces and sat up with his hands on his knees.

"Mirza,"—he gazed at her searchingly—"you said once jokingly—as far as you can make a joke—that duty calls for courage. Do you have the courage to come with me and find out what there really is to fear about the Ghyrrm?"

He was never quite sure why he had made this proposal, but he could have bitten his tongue off immediately, for she only straightened, looked at him quietly for a moment, and said, "Wait one moment, Kappstein." Then she pattered up the metal staircase in her bare feet.

They did not speak at all, and it was a terribly long walk from the ship to the compound gateway. It was late evening on Ghre, a planet of long days and nights, and the sky was dark. the stars obliterated by dust. Kappstein didn't care about the time; at this point he would have routed them out of their beds, if they slept in beds. But he was not without fear.

The guard opened the gate for them without any recognizable emotion, but he followed them into the receiving station. Kappstein had been too proud to risk a snub from Mirza by suggesting she go back, and now it was too late. He himself had passed the point of no return a good while back.

Their companion turned them over to the guards in the antechamber, and left them.

"Drsiilef? Fambr?" Kappstein asked. One of the guards went out for a moment. When he came back he took a weapon from a holster at his waist and rested it on his other arm, not aiming. The weapon looked as narrow and fragile as the Ghyrrm themselves, but it was presumably capable of destruction. Kappstein was afraid to look at Mirza.

There were no seats, and they stood there, waiting. The whole installation had been set up to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

receive intersteller visitors, and it had a barracks-look, bare and temporary. Kappstein had never seen any sign of warmth or love on Ghre. Perhaps once, in the contained emotions of Fambr as he bent over his dead wife?

They waited. The silence was broken once by voices, a loud reedy chord of altercation. Then it died away, and a few moments later Fambr, Drsiilef, and several other Ghyrrm came in.

And Kappstein stood there; he had no desk to lean on, no pipe or pen to wave in his hand, no chair to sit on and rest hands on knees; he was unshaven, half-dressed, and bleary with strain, and he felt ridiculously naked and alone. But he had to begin.

"I have come to tell you something," he said simply. "Something more important than anything you will ever discover for yourselves. It is this: animal tissue does not liquefy and decay instantaneously at death in the world of GalFed as it does on this world. In fact, we have never seen it happen before, and this is the only world we know of where it takes place."

All the Ghyrrm stood quite still for a moment. Then Drsiilef said, "My friend, we knew that by the time the first expedition left here. We substantiated it by clipping a few of your hairs and a flake of your skin secretly when we were examining you."

Kappstein nodded very slowly. He understood now what the Ghyrrm had been trying to tell him. "From loose hairs on our clothing, a bit of fingernail scraped off on a rough surface . . ." He glanced at Mirza and translated one sentence. She went pale, and looked as though she expected to be flayed and spitted at once.

Kappstein remembered the feeling of greed he had sensed during his examination, the tenor of certain remarks, odd hesitations. "Then why did you not ask us to help you? We would have done so as far as we could."

Drsiilef hesitated once more. "The first expedition left us volumes of Galactic laws and the regulations we would have had to obey before becoming a member of GalFed. We spent a great deal of time reading them, partly because they were not in our language, and partly because it had never fallen to our lot to exchange knowledge with other peoples . . . we found, in short so many nobilities in your laws, such reverence for all forms of life, and such care in its preservation—"

Soap of the purest Jewsfat.

"Oh, my God!" Kappstein clutched his head in his hands.

Drsiilef continued imperturbably, "—that we knew you would never accept us when you discovered what we had to do to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

learn about the structure of our bodies." Kappstein had used the phrase himself: *why could not the Ghyrrm have been allowed bodies of which they could learn the structure . . .*

He translated for Mirza and said, "But you told us!"

"Let me explain: we have lately been able to get rid of disease-bearing microscopic lifeforms when we catch them on the living person, but we still have no recourse against flash infections that become pandemic, and when a person dies mysteriously here, whether from disease, malfunction, or murder, his death remains a mystery forever. All of our wars and revolutions have been fought over whether to use living persons in the laboratory as you have seen them used.

"Believe that we are not cruel! We have ideals—or would like to have them . . ." he closed his eyes for a moment and the implosive black of his pupils was only half-veiled by thin skin ". . . but our bodies are too frail to carry them out. It is true that there are some among us who would have liked to kill you as soon as you arrived and use your bodies to find out as much as possible about *some* form—any form —of animal life—yes, there were some."

"And I am one of them," said Fambr. He had produced one of the narrow weapons from his belt, and was aiming it.

"Has it come at last?" Kappstein asked. But it was a question of the empty air. He answered it himself by keeping still.

Drsiilef had turned towards Fambr. "There are no stairs on Ghre, you see." He allowed the tableau to remain for one second, then gestured, and several of the other Ghyrrm seized Fambr and removed the weapon.

He stood in their grasp without struggling. There were no tears in his eyes; his body could not afford to lose one drop of moisture in Ghre's dry air.

"I don't believe he had planned to kill you," said Drsiilef. "He has allowed himself to become unbalanced. He will be punished."

"Don't!" cried Kappstein.

Drsiilef looked at Kappstein for a long moment. Then he turned to the others and said in the lingua franca, "Take him back to his home and let him go." He waited till they had gone and said, "We would not have put him in the laboratory."

Kappstein swabbed his forehead with a handkerchief. "But why did you show it to us? Why?"

"Please understand," Drsiilef said diffidently. "It cost us a great deal to make the decision

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to show you what you would consider horrors.

"We know you find our attitudes strange and inimical; we hoped—those of us who fought for this ideal—that you would pity us for what we were forced to do, and that a Federation which reverences life as much as yours would find the tolerance to accept our kind of life as well."

Kappstein scratched his grizzled cheek. "You showed a strange way of demonstrating your thesis, my friend. But I believe I understand what you mean. But," he said, "I would like to add, however, that the codes of law you have studied represent the essence of GalFed's aspirations, rather than the tally of its achievements."

The way back was shorter, like any path already once traversed. Kappstein was a little afraid to look closely at his motive in bringing Miraz. He had not consciously wanted to browbeat her; to break the silence he explained the gist of the meeting in a few sentences and added, "I noticed you were down on the crew list as T. Petrov. This is a mistake, is it not so?"

She stiffened, and her step slowed a little. He wondered what he had done now. Then she said, "No. My name is Tatiana."

He said, "Oh."

She felt obliged to explain: "Mirza is a—a kind of nickname.'

"It is a strange one. You do not like the name Tatiana."

"No . . ." She faltered: "My husband used to call me Mirza, because—because he said I was arrogant as a Persian despot but that he loved me anyway."

Kappstein repressed a smile. "And then?" he asked gently.

She shrugged. "Then he stopped loving me, I suppose, and left me."

"But you kept the name Mirza—why? Out of defiance, to punish yourself, to let him know that if he came back—"

"Please!"

"Tatiana is a fine name. I think of princesses in perfumed furs, silver sled runners, bells . . ."

She raised her face and said seriously, "But they are relics of a decayed imperialism."

"Then, my dear, you must call yourself a gentle name like Lillian, or Rose."

They had reached the airlock, and she looked back towards the Ghyrrm installation. "Are you really intending to ask GalFed to help them?"

"If there is any voice granted to me in the decision, I do."

"But I still believe they are cruel and savage under the veneer of civilization."

He was tempted to say: *And your civilization, Mirza, under the minarets, has history shown it*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to be so kind and gentle? But he only remarked, "There are so many real dragons to hunt in the Universe, we ought not to tremble before paper ones."

She smiled faintly, and he did not want to say whether he considered Fambr's weapon a paper dragon. He let the matter drop.

The compound under the blue sun was hot as a forcing-house. Kappstein handed down the last of the instrument-cases, and swabbed his streaming neck as Mirza checked them off. His own food and instruments were packed in the space-boat ready for the trip to one of the atmosphereless worlds.

He climbed back into the ship, careful to avoid Chowder who was sleeping on the threshold. It was cool inside; he had stripped to the waist and he went into the cabin for his shirt. Ken had followed him in. "Not scared to show your hairy chest around any more?"

"No, but I still feel I ought to lose a little weight." Buttoning his shirt, he began to feel vaguely uneasy. Dear God, not again! But there was something different in the cabin, and—

"Ken! What has happened to Sheppard's books?" The medical tomes in thin paper and silk bindings were gone.

Ken reddened. He said shyly, "Well, Laz, they didn't give you much help with paranoid schizophrenia, so I gave them to Fambr—for Drsiilef. They might get some use out of them."

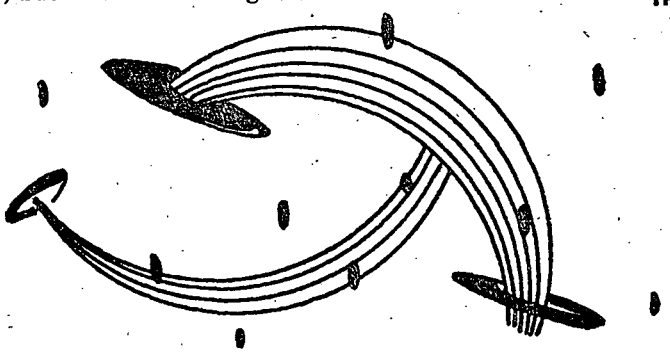
Kappstein nodded, appreciating the effort it must have cost Ken to make this gesture. "At this rate you will soon be making friends with the cat." He looked back at the shelf.

"But Ken," he said gravely, "the *Anatomy of Melancholy* is not a medical book."

"Oh, I know that—but I thought it might do them some good."

"At least it is a beginning," said Kappstein.

THE END

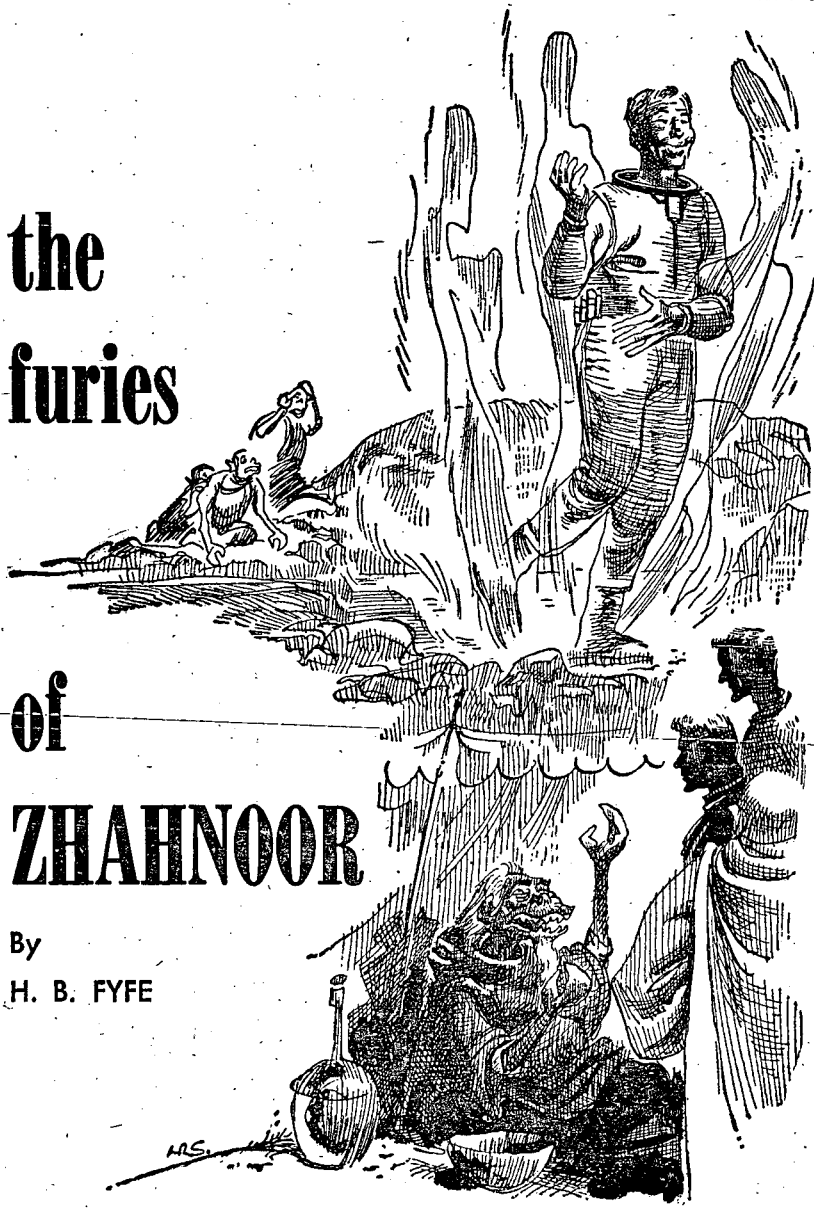


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

the furies of ZHAHNOOR

By
H. B. FYFE



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The strange blue shadows gibbered of treasure, and led Tawmsin into a world existing only for those whose minds pierced a new dimension.

WAIT ye! Pause but a moment, ye burden bearers in the narrow, sun-painted street! Gather round, merchants and travelers who pass by on the shady side!

You see before you none but Baryk—the best, the most renowned, the very magician and enchanter of all Kyoneer's spinners of street tales. Would you not take pleasure in hearing one of Baryk's stories?

I shall weave you a tapestry of adventure that will clothe you from the heat of noon and carry you far from the moneyed bustle of the city marts—a tale to numb the memory of chill winds whining through the black night where your caravans huddled in the dunes north of Kyoneer's gates, with the sand stinging and hissing at the flaps of the tents.

Listen to me! Listen to Baryk, the prince of crossroads performers. I shall tell of the Earthman of Zhahnoor, one who early came out of black space to our planet Tolv, wandering among stars as many of you travel the desert or climb the frigid ice mountains beyond the Great Sea.

Of course, of course! A small contribution is thrice welcome . . . thank you, sir! And you, too, my lord—just pass the pouch onward, if you please.

Ah, then! I see that enough have gathered to make worthwhile telling the story I have in mind, one of the strangest and one you will hear only from Baryk. In its true form, of course! Baryk has his own sources of fables, and does not dawdle sheepishly about the stands of other tale-tellers to memorize garbled versions of their poor efforts.

Here, right here, and right now, you shall hear of that starborn being from distant, mysterious Earth—he who encountered the murmuring shadows of Zhahnoor the Blue, the fifth of our worlds that revolve about the Light.

I see that two or three of the bold space voyages from Earth have joined our gathering. Welcome, welcome! You may find this tale new to your ears, having arrived in the great star-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ships of this day. He of whom I speak was a pilot of the cramped, fragile shells that first visited our system.

Well, my good fellow citizens of Kyoneer and the springy-striding wanderers of the wastelands between the narrow seas are impatient. Into my story, then, without delay! I pause only for late-comers on the fringe of the crowd to have their fair chance at the pouch of *ikakh* hide that is passing from claw to claw. A thousand thanks, Earthmen! The smallest of coins is an honor.

Peace, fellow! Do not stay, then, if you be indeed so miserly —but in the presence of the noble Earthian star travelers, show better manners than to stir up the dust of the street with those great clawed feet! Are not these walls of dun clay dingy enough?

So! He is gone, and good riddance. Now—this Earthman was called Tawmsun, or Tawmsin, which you will know for a star name and none of this world. As you Earthmen in the audience will have noticed, we have evolved by a different line than you, despite our outward resemblances; and the air sacs by which we sound words past our long jaws are not truly made for the saying of Earth speech.

Still, it is of this Tawmsin that I tell. This Earthman doubtless meant to bring his void-chilled vessel down to the balmy surface of Tolv, where already lived an Earthian colony. By some error, however, he mistook for Tolv the gleaming blue orb of Zhahnoor, thereby fathering rumors that are legend.

Believe me not, then, those whom I see staring obstinately at me out of great yellow eyes and scratching in the brown dust of the shady spots with your curved claws! Yet I had the truth from the small-toothed mouth of an Earthman who knew Tawmsin intimately, before they took him back to—but that is another tale!

Also, there were three native Tolvians who witnessed the strange fate of Tawmsin. They were volunteers chosen by the Earthmen to help examine the other worlds circling the Light; and their names, which may be seen in the records, are Doolni and Yarlyamah of our own city of Kyoneer, and one Rholpl, a sailor from Eksh.

These three had been left on Zhahnoor by the Earthmen to hold a station built there by the star travelers. This had several domes, clear as the waters of our sea but tough as the dried hide of a desert lizard. Within were living quarters and all manner of instruments and machines. The Tolvians, as instructed,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

were to observe certain stars nightly and to make records of the weather, for the Earthmen had little time to spend on Zhahnoor, or so they said.

They were also to guide Earthian ships, if any approached to land.

Thus, Doolni one night hastened to the sleeping dome and awoke the others.

"There is an Earthian ship coming!" he called.

But though they dashed out to the marvelous communicator of the Earthmen, they were unable to speak to the approaching spaceship. This caused huge embarrassment until Yarlyamah saw through the clear skin of the dome a trail of fire streaking down like a star-spark in the night sky.

"It lands this side of the mountains!" he shouted. "We must go find it!"

Now, the air on Zhahnoor is not as rich as that blanketing the fish markets of Kyoneer, and it is cold besides, but it can be breathed. The three watchers bundled themselves into light but warm Earthian garments altered to fit their larger hands and feet, and set out. It lacked but a little of dawn.

"No matter," said Doolni. "We will be nearly there when the Light rises."

So it was that dawn found them near the Earthian ship. The Light mounts the sky speedily on Zhahnoor. It glinted coldly on the upthrusting dart of metal, and lit the great fins straddling an expanse of flat, sandy ground. A dark opening in the ship's flank and a ladder to the surface indicated that the crew had emerged.

"There is an Earthman!" exclaimed Doolni, peering at a figure which strolled from behind a towering fin. "But what do I see about him?"

Floating and swirling around the form of the Earthman could be dimly seen a number of shadows. Shape they had none, nor any plain color, although as the Tolvians drew nearer a faint bluish or violet hue became visible. It was almost as if the Earthman were followed by tenuous clouds of transparent, ever-uncurling smoke. As he walked, he seemed to be speaking to someone.

"I do not like this at all!" hissed Rholpl. "It reminds me of tales I used to hear while sailing the southern seas. We had best let him be!"

"That we cannot; our duty is to aid Earthmen landing here," Doolni decided.

They edged closer, warily eyeing the swirling outlines in the thin air. As the Light rose higher in the sky, the blueness of the smoke paled until only a few

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

faint patches revealed their presence.

"I remember now," said Yarlyamah, "that the builders of the domes made jokes of things like this—or what I took for jokes at the time. Can it be that Earthian eyes see more than ours?"

"It may be," answered Doolni, recalling how short a time the Earthmen had lingered to explore. There had been talk of whisperings in the air, but this was blamed upon imagination or the thinness of the oxygen supply.

He placed himself before the Earthman and spoke in the latter's tongue.

"Greetings!"

"Oh . . . hello," said the Earthman, drifting to a halt. He stared at the Tolvians as if he had not seen them until that moment. "Say, this is the greatest place ever! Doesn't anybody do anything about all this stuff?"

"What can he mean? What is 'stuff'?" whispered Doolni, backing away.

"Ask him, fool!" muttered Rholpl. "How else shall we learn?"

The Earthman, a listening expression on his face, seemed about to wander on.

"Tell me, star being," asked Doolni, "of what stuff do you speak?"

"The gold, of course," replied the Earthman, surprised. "Can't you hear what they say about foot-wide veins in every outcropping of rock?"

He stared at the Tolvians for a long moment, during which they gaped in bewilderment at the empty air . . . empty, that is, save for faint suggestions of shadows not called for by the position of the Light.

"Oh . . . I see," said the Earthman. "Some local etiquette doubtless requires you to ignore those to whom you have not been introduced."

Doolni, having glanced at his friends, tried to relieve the awkward silence.

"I am Doolni, of Tolv, which is the next planet inward," he explained. "These are my companions, Yarlyamah and Rholpl. We keep the observation station built here on Zhahnoor by your fellow Earthmen."

"Zhahnoor?" murmured the Earthman. "I must have misunderstood. I thought this was—Oh, I beg your pardon! My name is Tawmsin."

Now, may I remind you, friends, that the mouth of Baryk is not formed well for the saying of Earthian names; so do not doubt if some of the star travelers among you here in the street of Kyoneer wonder at the name. It may have sounded more

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

like Tawmpsun, or Toomsan, or such, but there was that man—

Yes, yes, friend! I will go on with the story, although I see not your cause for complaint, seated as you are on the shady side of the street while I squat with the glare of the noon Light in my eyes—but to go on:

The Earthman, Tawmsin, gestured at the empty air beside him.

"I do not know their names," he apologized, "or I'd introduce you. I got so excited hearing about the mining possibilities here that I forgot my manners."

The three Tolvians squinted at the air, then at each other.

"Try changing the subject," whispered Yarlyamah. "That may be more polite."

Doolni winked both big yellow eyes in agreement.

"Tawmsin, my friend," he said, "it would be only fitting that you visit the station and record your observations for the sake of the Earthian explorers who collect data on the yet-unknown worlds of our system. It is but a short way."

"Good idea," agreed Tawmsin graciously. "We can go in the helicopter."

"Your ship carries a helicopter?" asked Doolni politely. "I have seen such machines on Tolv."

Tawmsin frowned, then shrugged.

"It's not in the ship," he said. "*This* is a helicopter, here before us. Not mine; it belongs to the beings of this planet. Do you never see them fly about?"

Doolni looked over his shoulder at his companions, an easier and more natural contortion for a Tolvian than for an Earthman.

"What should I do now?" he asked Yarlyamah wryly.

"Just step in and sit still," Tawmsin answered instead. "Now, the rest of you get in with us, and we'll be off for your station."

Yarlyamah and Rholpl consulted with small gestures, and straggled over to complete the group. Tawmsin seemed satisfied.

Doolni hesitantly started toward the trail they had left in the sand, expecting protests. Tawmsin said nothing, however, during the entire march to the domes. When they halted outside the air lock, he bobbed up in a little jump and landed with knees bent, just as if he had hopped from the cabin of a flying machine.

"We had better give this one some Earthian medicines as soon as we get him inside," Rholpl muttered as they entered the lock to the main dome.

"But which ones?" objected Doolni.

"All of them'!" snapped the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sailor. "By the Great Southern Whirlpool, there is something mightily wrong with him!"

"I, too, have wondered," admitted Doolni. "Can it be possible that he hears and sees things beyond the range of our Tolvian senses?"

Inside, they offered the Earthman food and drink, choosing items favored by the first explorers. Tawmsin accepted courteously, but showed more interest in learning about Zhahnoor. When they brought out the few maps produced from the machine-pictures of the Earthmen, he seemed disappointed.

"It would be hard to locate any claims from these," he said.

"Claims?" repeated Doolni.

"Mining claims," explained Tawmsin. "That is, declarations that I have discovered places to dig metal, and therefore own them."

"Oh, I see," Doolni said, striving to remember Earthian regulations.

"There's a fortune in gold out there," Tawmsin said. "With such rich ore, I want to get in on the ground floor!"

"We have no cellars in these domes," answered Doolni.

"Fool!" hissed Rholpl in his ear. "That is just an Earthian expression. It is to say 'cast the first net,' or some such comment."

Tawmsin, interested for once in reality, stared at the ex-sailor.

"That is what I meant," he confirmed. "You realize that fitting out a ship for such a long space hop is expensive. I must get the best return possible."

"If you will forgive the question," asked Doolni, clutching his claws in embarrassment, "were you so hardy as to travel the black depths of space alone?"

Tawmsin immediately resumed his dreamy expression.

"Oh, no. There were four of us. The others prefer to remain in the ship."

"I see," said Doolni. He wondered how to change the subject to something he really could see. "Then it remains but to inquire how we may aid you. Do you wish to send a message to the Earthian colony on Tolv?"

Tawmsin declined, saying he wished to explore before making his claims. He did request them to come to his ship in the morning, in case he should need help with the gold he expected to find. The Tolvians agreed, and watched him leave the airlock. Outside, before starting back, he took another little hop into the air.

"He flies again," commented Yarlyamah. "Now, tell me, what is this gold he keeps talking about? If it is what I think, there is not any here."

They discussed their visitor at length throughout the day,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

except during the rest period they had adopted to make night-time observations possible; but they could reach no agreement. Rholpl held that the Earthman was deranged, and cited many horrifying tales of shipwreck in the southern seas to prove it. Yarlyamah suggested that Tawmsin's actions might be relatively normal as spacemen went. Doolni brooded over the peculiar shadows and refused to take sides.

The next morning, no clearer in their minds, they again donned their outdoor garments to sally forth into the thin, chill air. They found Tawmsin leaning wearily against the ladder to the air lock of his ship.

"Glad you fellows showed up," he greeted them. "I can hardly keep my eyes open . . . been up all night . . . but I hated to leave all the stuff unguarded."

"Stuff?" echoed Doolni, glancing about the empty ground.

"He looks exhausted," murmured Yarlyamah.

"I feel cold just from the sight of this," added Rholpl. "He is shivering. Maybe he did stay up all night, cold as it gets on Zhahnoor."

Tawmsin had straightened up and walked a few steps from the ladder. He stood with feet astride, rubbing the small of his back and stretching himself.

"Just look at all the gold the natives brought me," he said, looking down.

"Gold?" repeated Doolni, ignoring the murmurs of "natives?" behind him. "I am perhaps not familiar with the Earthian name. Which is the gold?"

"The yellow stuff," replied Tawmsin impatiently, pointing to an area of dirt scuffed by his own footprints. "The bars. The yellow metal."

"Oh!" said Doolni unhappily. "I . . .uh . . . I thought it would be that."

He looked to his friends for help. They seemed fascinated by the horizon.

"We shall be glad to carry it into the ship for you," Doolni said at last. "But should you not rest? This cold . . . so much further from the Light than Tolv . . ."

Tawmsin nodded, as the Earthmen do to show agreement.

"Yes," he said. "It will be all right now that you are here. If you can take the stuff up to the air lock, I can stow it inside later. You needn't go inside at all."

He thanked them and began slowly to climb the ladder. The moment he had drawn himself laboriously into the air lock, Rholpl turned on Doolni.

"And what will you say when

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he asks where is this yellow gold of his?"

"Come on back to the station!" snapped Doolni, starting off rapidly.

"What for?" demanded Rholpl, but he trotted after the other.

"We must learn of this gold in the books left by the Earthmen. It may be that we can find or make some. This Tawmsin is obviously of a strange mind."

The three returned, though not without much haggling on the way. In the station, they sifted through the data and information left by those who built the domes. Bit by bit, the nature of the metal was revealed to them.

"*Choori!* But little of that can be found on Zhahnoor," protested Rholpl.

"Yet Tawmsin seems much troubled by it," said Yarlyamah. "If we tell him the truth—after such visions—his madness might become a danger."

A silence settled over them like a cloud.

"So," Doolni sighed, "we all think he is mad, even for an Earthman?"

Their looks answered him, and he continued, "Then we must humor him while we send a message to Tolv."

"Meanwhile, how can we make gold?" demanded Rholpl scornfully.

"It need not be real gold, just so it has a yellow color. The machines for making Earthian plastics out of the ground, to repair the domes, might do it. Who remembers how the Earthmen controlled the color?"

No better idea arising, they went to the workshop. After many attempts, Yarlyamah made an Earthian machine produce bars of a pale yellow substance an Earthman would call plastic. Following much criticism, paint was resorted to and sprayed on with another machine until the color seemed reasonable.

Rholpl fetched the small power cart used for moving equipment around the station. They loaded the "gold" bars onto it and spent the best part of the afternoon transporting them to the spaceship and up the ladder. Tawmsin remained somewhere in the oil-odored depths of the vessel, so the Tolvians passed a line over the topmost rung of the ladder to hoist the bars up a few at a time. They took turns stacking them neatly in the air lock.

"Maybe that will keep him happy," sighed Doolni, descending after his turn.

"We had better hurry," said Rholpl, "if we hope to talk to Tolv tonight."

They hastened back to the station, but were just too late. Their side of Zhahnoor was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

swinging away from Tolv. Yarlyamah attempted to signal, but he could pick up no image on the Earthian com-screen.

"No matter," grumbled Doolni. "Tomorrow will have to do."

There was more grumbling in the night, when the time for star observations arrived, and in the middle of the following morning when Doolni prodded his companions into visiting the spaceship again. Approaching it, they were shocked to discover the Earthman busily pitching yellow bars out of his air lock.

"What does this mean?" Doolni shouted up to him indignantly.

Tawmsin ceased his frenzied labor to look over the rim of the air lock.

"Oh, hello, there!" he called down amiably. "You . . . uh . . . fellows worked awfully hard, I see. The . . . er . . . fact is, I've changed my mind about the gold."

Doolni silenced the muffled groans behind him with a sharp gesture.

"Is something wrong with the *choori*—the gold?" he inquired.

"No, no! But I just heard of large deposits of uranium ore hereabouts. I'd be silly to waste cargo space on mere gold. Wait —I'll get the signs!"

He disappeared inside, leaving them gaping into the air.

"And what is uranium?" asked Rholpl sourly.

"A great Earthian metal," answered Yarlyamah. "They use it to power ships and weapons. Also, a great poison, I am told, to those who are careless of it."

"Leave him to hunt this uranium, then, and come back to the station!"

Before they could answer Rholpl, Tawmsin appeared again in the air lock. He began to lower a bundle of slats on a rope. Doolni stepped forward to receive it.

"He has taken plastic shelves from some part of his ship," said Yarlyamah.

Doolni turned the slats over. Rough symbols were painted upon them.

"It is Earthian writing," he pointed out. "He has each piece numbered."

Tawmsin scurried down the ladder with such eagerness that he slipped about twice his height above the ground and slid the rest of the way. He regained his balance, seized the slats, and led the way toward the first gentle rise nearby.

"I want to stake my claims before anyone else lands here," he explained.

"Claims?" asked Doolni, as the three Tolvians trotted to keep up.

"For the uranium. You can

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

help me get it done today. Here—each of you take four or five signs! Spread out between here and the hills. Plant them firmly; a pile of rocks is best!"

Doolni eyed the expanse of land between the ship and the foothills of the mountains. It was occupied by low, dry-looking shrubs and a prickly sort of brown grass. Here and there, a tooth of rock thrust above the surface, and in some places all vegetation had been suffocated by patches of blown sand.

"And where should we place these signs?" he asked.

"Why . . . wherever the ground glows with that bluish light," said Tawmsin. "Come on, come on! I'll show you before we separate."

Doolni looked at the others. Rholpl reached up and groped carefully with extended claws in the air about his own head, in the common gesture implying lost wits. Doolni glared, and thrust a share of the plastic markers at the ex-sailor. Tawmsin had already started off at a brisk pace.

"If I can humor him," Doolni growled, "so can you! Stick these somewhere!"

He studied Rholpl's expression, then added, "In the ground, I mean."

Tawmsin was bent over at the edge of a parched, sandy area, endeavoring to drive in one of his signs. Doolni went to his aid with a loose rock. The others departed with little enthusiasm in different directions.

It was late afternoon when Doolni trailed the Earthman back to the ship. He gruffly greeted Yarlyamah and Rholpl where they sat soaking up warmth from the setting Light beside one of the great tail fins, which shadowed the discarded "gold."

Tawmsin thanked them and expressed a desire to rest. It did not seem to occur to him to ask them into the ship.

The Tolvians had started for the station before Doolni recovered his speech.

"His brains have been sucked out like an egg!" he declared. "All that remains is an empty shell. You should see the places he decided were locations of this power metal! And the way he kept talking to his shadows, even when they were gone!"

"They worry me," said Yarlyamah, but Doolni was too angry to listen.

"It becomes urgent," he rushed on, "that the Earthian colony on Tolv send for him. If necessary, we must make a tape record, to be sent automatically."

"How shall we handle him meanwhile?" asked Rholpl.

"Stay out of his path! He will have us busy with all sorts of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

silly tasks. By the Light! The rocks I carried for him, to help him set up his signs!"

"Do you think those shadows really speak to *him*?" asked Yarlyamah.

"If I really see them . . . well . . . I think perhaps they tell him his own dreams. Maybe Earthmen are more sensitive than we. But I put you the question: if there existed such fabulous treasures on Zhahnoor, would they have been missed by the other Earthian explorers? In their way, they are very sharp fellows. They do not brave the awesome depths of space to overlook what lies beneath their claws."

"True," admitted Rholpl.

"These shadows," mused Doolni. "Could they be why the Earthmen stayed so briefly on Zhahnoor? Are they akin to the desert mirages told of on Tolv?"

"But are they Tawmsin's mirages, or ours?" asked Rholpl.

"Well, I am almost tempted to go out among them and wish for something, to see if I am shown my desire. I think Tawmsin's thoughts are given back somehow by these things, so that he seems to see what he dreams of finding."

"It did not happen to the other Earthmen," objected Rholpl.

Doolni clicked his claws together impatiently.

"Then there is something a little crazier about this one," he admitted.

As early as possible the next morning, Yarlyamah succeeded in sending a call across the empty void between Zhahnoor and Tolv, to arouse the Earthian colony. One of the chief Earthmen, Brux by name, appeared on the communicator.

"Tawmsin, eh?" he said when they told him. "He's overdue here. What happened?"

Doolni stepped before the screen and told of their experiences in detail. Brux looked worried. He questioned Doolni at length, and the Tolvians could see him beckon to some assistant for information.

"He was supposed to have a party of four, counting himself," said Brux. "You have seen only Tawmsin? You would know if another had come out?"

"It is true that all Earthmen look more or less alike," answered Doolni, "but we have seen only one. And, by the Light, I have told you how he acts!"

"Yes, yes," said Brux hastily. "He must be very sick. It is urgent that we send for him before he can do himself harm. Meanwhile, please watch him carefully."

Afterward, the three watchers stared thoughtfully for some time at the darkened screen. At last, Doolni roused himself and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

called for their outdoor clothing.

"We promised to watch him," he said. "We had better start before he runs off somewhere on his next crazy idea."

They plodded glumly across the windy plain, wondering what new problem would greet them new-born from Tawmsin's imagination. They were, nevertheless, quite unprepared for the sight that met them.

"What is he doing?" gasped Yarlyamah.

"Can't you see he dances?" retorted Rholpl sarcastically. "Or did he hurt a foot tripping over some wondrous new discovery?"

"That was no joke," said Doolni. "The dancing, I mean. Why else should he skip to and fro, repeating certain patterns and gestures? Look there—how the bows to someone invisible, then extends his arms and prances in a circle!"

Rholpl was forced to admit similarity to certain Tolvian ceremonies.

"Is it a mating dance?" he asked as they drew nearer. "You would think he had someone with him."

Yarlyamah grunted, and pointed a claw in the Earthman's direction.

"It almost looks as if he *has!*" he exclaimed.

Something flitted in the air around Tawmsin. Now and again, his figure rippled as though seen through a heat wave —and it was cold. Doolni recalled the bluish shadows that had trailed the Earthman at other times.

"Never did I think they would dance with him," he murmured. "Are they more than natural forces that affect him? Can they actually be alive?"

"Whatever they are," Rholpl told him, "they do have good rhythm. I could do a sailor dance to it. Listen—see if I catch the beat!"

His voice throbbed, humming a deep-throated, wordless song in time with Tawmsin's gyrations. Doolni found himself twitching his claws in sympathy. He swayed to the infectious rhythm. Tawmsin looked around as Rholpl's voice reached him. He halted where he happened to be, but continued to beat time.

"Hello, you two," he said, nodding to Doolni and Yarlyamah. "Finally decided to come out of the ship, eh? The music wake you up?"

This greatly puzzled Doolni, but before he could speak, Tawmsin faced Rholpl.

"Tell me, Dorothy," said Tawmsin, "how did *you* ever catch up with us?"

Rholpl directed an embarrassed and perplexed glance at Doolni.

"He mistakes me for someone

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with an Earthian name," whispered the ex-sailor.

"Speak up, there!" Tawmsin ordered sharply. "I don't like the way you three get together whenever my back is turned. Must we have it out again?"

Doolni motioned to Rholpl to answer, for he could think of no reply and Yarlyamah seemed intent upon the shadows that drifted a little way off.

"Have what out?" asked Rholpl desperately.

"You know what, Dotty! Answer me! How did you catch up when we put you out the air lock a dozen lightyears back in space? Did you do this just to make more trouble among the rest of us? There was plenty, you know!"

"No, I am sorry, I do not know," Rholpl floundered, casting a worried glance at Doolni again. "Now I am yet a third person," he muttered.

"Oh, they haven't told you yet what to say!" Tawmsin seemed bitter as he, too, looked at Doolni. "Our good friend, Johnny, and his little blonde Myra—they didn't tell you the trouble we had, left with just three of us in the ship? Two men and a girl: you can guess what happened, especially with both of them plotting behind my back. And when it did, Myra was dumb enough to get in the line of fire!"

Here, he glared at Yarlyamah with such intensity that the Tolvian, turning from his observation of the retreating shadows, was startled into jumping.

The Earthman had been edging closer. Suddenly, he reached out to seize Rholpl by the arm. The sailor drew back just in time.

"What's this, Dotty?" demanded Tawmsin. "Did you come back to make up for dying on me, or do you have some idea of haunting me? Come here, I want to settle this once and for all!"

He shouted the last as Rholpl retreated before him. Then, finding the sailor elusive, Tawmsin leaped forward with both arms outstretched. Rholpl dodged and scampered behind the edge of the nearest tail fin supporting the ship.

"Stop them!" exclaimed Doolni, but Yarlyamah pulled him back.

He saw the reason almost immediately, for Rholpl bounded into sight again. Tawmsin panted after him, and they began their second circuit of the ship.

"Help me!" pleaded Rholpl as he dashed past. "I don't know whether he seeks to murder me or mate me, but I object to either one!"

Doolni hesitated too long with his mouth open, and Tawmsin disappeared unmolested around the fin. As the two passed on the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

next lap, Doolni sought to block the Earthman's path. He had to duck a vicious swing of the latter's fist.

"You were lucky," Yarlyamah commented. "Suppose he had claws!"

"What a comfort you are!" snarled Doolni. "Like a star-spark falling across the heavens warms the freezing desert traveler!"

"Quiet!" hissed Yarlyamah. "Here they come again."

Rholpl, showing an embarrassed purple flush, skidded in the sand as he rounded the third tail fin and swerved to get behind his friends. Tawmsin, in hot pursuit, lurched aside to avoid Doolni. At this point, Yarlyamah thrust out a big foot.

Tawmsin left the ground head-first in a long swoop at the tail fin. This gave off a single bell note to the hammer stroke of the Earthman's head.

After a moment, Rholpl peeped cautiously around the edge of the fin. Tawmsin lay motionless where he had fallen. The ex-sailor sidled into the open.

"With what did you hit him?" he asked in awed tones.

"Oh, be quiet!" snapped Doolni. "You and your singing and your fatal charm!"

Rholpl still wore a persecuted expression some minutes later when they gave up for the time being their efforts to revive Tawmsin.

"I think he will live," said Doolni, "but it seems wiser to take him inside."

With some struggling, they carried Tawmsin up the ladder and into the ship. Yarlyamah found the switches for the lights in the cramped corridor beyond the airlock. They debated for a moment the probable location of Tawmsin's cabin.

"I'll look up this ladder," said Rholpl, and climbed to the next deck.

He returned in a matter of seconds, sliding down the ladder in his haste.

"There are two more of them there," he reported.

"Well, why don't they come and help?" demanded Doolni.

"They will neither give nor receive help," announced Rholpl grimly. "They are an Earthman and a she-Earthman, and I think he must have killed them some time ago. The blood is well dried."

Tawmsin groaned. Doolni, leaning wearily against a bulkhead, stared at him.

"By the Light, this is all we need! I promised Brux we would take care of him, but it will be dangerous to keep this one with us."

"Can we not send him off to Tolv?" suggested Yarlyamah.

Doolni clicked his claws doubt-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fully. He decided to have a look at the bodies Rholpl had reported. When he climbed down again, he looked no happier.

"You heard what he said outside," he reminded the others. "I think we may guess that what happened was as he hinted. Perhaps we can decipher the logbook later. First, we must see what he makes of us when he awakes."

"And if he still imagines me to be this Dotty?" asked Rholpl plaintively.

Doolni eyed him sternly.

"If he does," he said, "you must act the part. Warn him that he will be haunted until he delivers you to the promised destination of Tolv."

"But how shall I explain staying here? He is not that shell-headed."

"I fear you are right," agreed Doolni. "You will have to go with him!"

He hissed down Rholpl's injured wails.

"We will go with you, naturally—not that I doubt your ability to make him believe you are his Dotty, but just to make sure he does not dispatch you and once more descend upon us. Get ready, now; he opens his eyes!"

The Earthmen in the colony outside Kyoneer were aware, of course, of the approach of the ship, for they can tell these things with their marvelous instruments that see and measure further than we can imagine. It was a great surprise to them, however, when the three Tolvians landed with Tawmsin.

The Chief Earthman was angry at first, until it was pointed out to him that Tawmsin had landed the ship almost as well as if he had been in possession of his senses, and that he had been delivered alive into their hands.

The Earthian healing men took charge of the poor fellow, and probed into his memory until the whole story came out. As Doolni had thought, there were four Earthians to start with, and Tawmsin was the only survivor. Such was the loneliness of the void that he could not face its mysteries alone, and so went mad. When he landed on Zhahnoor, even the shadows seemed to speak to him.

This, at any rate, was the explanation of the Earthian healers. They kept Tawmsin here in Kyoneer until it was possbile to send him home in another ship, to be studied and perhaps restored to sanity.

Yet, despite the Earthian explanation, tales are still whispered about the blue shadows of Zhahnoor, mostly by Earthmen who have gone off to the blue planet after Tawmsin's fabled riches. I, myself—and Baryk,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

prince of story tellers, would say this only if he had seen with his own eyes—I have often watched Tawmsin in Kyoneer as he awaited a spaceship to take him home. Truly, he seemed to seek even here the weird shadows that reflected to him his dreams on Zhahnoor.

He commonly used to squat among the shadows of the shady street, staring before him, as if hearing breath-taking tales of hidden riches or far adventures—

Why, where are you all going, scuffling your big feet in the dust of the street and taking up your burdens . . .?

Oh, well, it is time. I began another tale, and your room will be welcome. Was there anyone who missed his chance to contribute a coin to poor Baryk? I have here the pouch of *ikakh* hide . . . no one? Ah, well, may the next gathering be as generous as you noble lords and artisans who now depart!

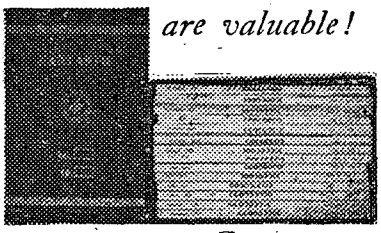
And, if I may comment, it is indeed a cheerful sight to see you all walking on the side of the street warmed by the rays of the Light. May all your days be bright and free of shadows!

THE END

Your copies of

fantastic

are valuable!



Keep them neat... clean... ready for instant reference!

Now you can keep a year's copies of FANTASTIC in a rich-looking leatherette file that makes it easy to locate any issue for ready reference.

Specially designed for FANTASTIC, this handy file—with its distinctive, washable Kivar cover and 16-carat gold leaf lettering—not only looks good but keeps every issue neat, clean and orderly.

So don't risk tearing and soiling your copies of FANTASTIC—an exciting source of reading enjoyment. Order several of these FANTASTIC volume files today. They are $2.50 each, postpaid—3 for $7.00, or 6 for $13.00. Satisfaction guaranteed, or your money back.

Order direct from:

JESSE JONES BOX CORP.

Dept. F

Box 5120, Philadelphia 41, Pa.

(Established 1843)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

STATUS QUAINT

By JACK SHARKEY

ILLUSTRATED by GRAYAM

Why go down to the fuse box when the electric appliances stop working? All you do is ask the fuse box to come up to you.

CRAIG didn't really *want* to watch the Voice of Firestone do excerpts from *La Boheme,* but it happened to be the favorite opera of Miss Gloria Gonzales, and Miss Gloria Gonzales was currently the favorite female on Craig's ambitious agenda.

Craig's plan was simple: Assume an interest in opera, and Miss Gonzales would assume an interest in him.

Which is why he'd left work early, skipped supper at the Italian place down the block, and rushed home to his walk-up apartment and flicked on the TV set even before removing his hat. A dash into the bedroom to re-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

move his coat and tie, a swift detour to the squat, eight-cubic-foot refrigerator in the kitchenette for a can of beer, then he settled before the set for his Crash Program on Culture.

If he could drop a few names tomorrow, he'd at least be on a speaking basis with her. And then he could borrow Charlie Brentano's Magnavox Hi-Fi and opera records, and ask her up to his apartment for an evening of musical madness.

The plan seemed feasible. And he'd been looking for a feasible approach since the first day she'd swivel-hipped into the office, her shoulder-length black curly hair shimmering above a torso that most resembled a top spinning on a mirror. She was new in town.

"Maybe I could show you around," he'd suggested.

"Thanks just the same," she'd smiled cooly, "but I've been around."

Her inflection carried a submerged frost warning, but Craig, dazzled by the crackling warmth of her cocoa-brown eyes, had plunged onward, heedless, "New York's a pretty big town. You might take a wrong turn and get lost."

"You know," she'd said sweetly, "you might take a hint and do the same."

Back at his desk, thawing out, Craig had decided that a subtler approach was indicated. Instead of attacking the iceberg with a blowtorch, he might be able to lure it gently toward warm southern seas, to turn it from jagged crystal spires into sultry pools of fudge and honey, Or steam!

His mind had begun losing itself in velvet reveries dealing with the melting of Miss Gonzales. What sort of girl would she be when the last glittering shard had steamed away?

The soft, pliant type that would be giggling putty in his hands?

Or the devil-may-care sort that whooped it up with champagne-filled slippers and torrid kisses?

Or, best of all, the kind that would retain the sheerest veneer of ice, just enough to tease him into turning the heat on her romantic thermostat.

And breaking the ice by degrees! Craig chuckled in a sinister manner, and rubbed his palms together gloatingly.

The chuckle seemed unwontedly loud to him.

All at once, he realized that it was strangely silent in the room. He looked at his TV screen. He'd flicked on the set, or thought he had—as soon as he'd entered the apartment.

The screen was still blank. Puzzled and annoyed, he tried

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the on/volume switch again. Then checked to be sure the plug was in the wall. Then, though he knew he was only kidding himself, he twirled the horizontal—and vertical-hold knobs, jiggled brightness and contrast and even the fine tuning knob.

The set remained silent and dark.

There wasn't even a hum to show him that it was at least *trying* to cooperate.

"Damn," he muttered, "of all nights to go out of whack!"

Frowning, he tried the light switch on the wall, which he hadn't touched on entering because darkness hadn't completely fallen. The bare bulbs in the ceiling fixture came on at once, dispelling a little of the creeping grey post-sunset glow from outside.

"Well," he scratched his head, "the *power's* on."

Craig turned off the lights again, preferring the cool twilight to the glare of the bulbs. It was only March, but it was warm and humid and summery, even with the lights off. He tried the set once more. Nothing.

"Must be a loose wire," he said, resorting to the layman's standard electronic alibi, that sounds decisive without actually pinpointing the trouble. The human mind cannot rest until it has a name for everything. His set, Craig Lescort decided, suffered from a loose wire, and that satisfied him. But would it satisfy Gloria Gonzales?

He was quite put out that he would miss the program, but his mind was at rest as to the reason. Until he tried to use the phone, to call a repair shop.

No click. No buzz. No operator.

"Damn," said Craig, hanging up, "that's strange."

On an impulse, he turned to his small bedside radio. Nothing happened. He looked in the back, which was open, and noted that the tubes were not even glowing. His first diagnosis would have been a power lack, but his lights were all working perfectly, fluorescent and incandescent alike. A funny impulsiveness prodding him, he tried his electric shaver. Plug in, switch on, it lay in his hands quietly as a block of wood.

"If that isn't the damnedest—" Craig shook his head, setting the shaver down on the edge of the sink. He felt an irritating nagging somewhere in his mind. It was not chagrin that he seemed to be electrically helpless, nor a fear that—after all, the world *tottered* on the brink of war—something had happened to cut off all programming and telephoning. That still wouldn't explain the shaver.

"This is just fine!" he muttered, sitting slouched back in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his easy chair and sipping at his beer. "No TV, no radio, can't even get anyone to come over and play poker! . . . Or get a date, which is just as well, because I can't shave anyhow! And Gloria wouldn't date me if I *did!*"

Craig's apartment was on the third floor, and his front window was open, the gap seeking a breeze to convey into the summer-humid discomfort of the small parlor. So Craig had no trouble hearing the taxi pull up out front, nor the slam of its door. Simple curiosity prompted him to lean to his right and glance streetward. Abel Jones, the building superintendent, was moving hurriedly toward the front door down below. Craig saw him cross the yellow checkerboard of light spilling across the sidewalk from the ground-level entrance hall, and heard the door shut just as Jones moved beyond Craig's range of vision to enter the building.

The TV, the radio, and the electric shaver back on the sink all hummed, buzzed and whirred into violent life, simultaneously. *Che gelida manina* vied with *Sh' Boom,* and lost. "What the hell!?" Craig was on his feet, the beer gushing unnoticed from the can that had dropped to the carpet. His mind barely able to think, Craig rushed from radio to TV to bathroom, snapping off each item's individual din, then stood quite still, trembling, and oddly cold.

Then he stepped to the phone and lifted the receiver. The dial tone was buzzing loudly, as though it had never been away.

Before he could quite coordinate his thoughts, or even try to puzzle out the strange turn of events from the ordinary, his eye fell on the still-gushing beer can, an island in a sea of amber lager and white foam. And by the time he'd retrieved the can from the floor, wiped up the mess, and half-angrily opened a new can, he recalled that Gloria's favorite Metropolitan contralto was singing those opera excerpts on Firestone, and that the show was ten minutes gone already, and he hastily lost himself in the sights and sounds of the program, his erstwhile trepidations sliding into the back of his mind for the rest of the evening. . . .

But in bed that night, lying sleepless between the limp warm sheets, the apartment dark except for the dim blue moonlight glowing through the window, Craig Lescort's thoughts returned to the inexplicable occurrences of the earlier evening.

"Power failure," he said to himself.

But the lights worked, his mind answered him.

"Loose wires."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"On all four objects?"

"A fuse, then. For the outlets those four were plugged into."

"A fuse that covers both front and back of the apartment?"

"Well, it could be, couldn't it?"

"All right, then: Who replaced it?"

"Hell, who replaces fuses, anyhow?"

"Jones."

"Well then, he—"

"From the front hall?"

"Go to sleep."

"You're avoiding the issue."

"Go to sleep!"

"Odd, isn't it, that Jones' return coincided so perfectly with the returning functioning!"

"Coincidence."

"Sure. Or loose wires," his mind mocked.

"Damn it!" Craig threw aside the top sheet and swung his legs over the side of the bed. He sat on the edge of the mattress and lit a cigarette, not turning on any lights, just sitting there in the dark and smoking. He invented theories, rejected them, invented more.

Had it been a single item, the TV alone, maybe, he could have passed the whole thing off. But *four* things . . .

"Why *Jones*, though?" he said half-aloud. "The only real tie-in I have is that everything began working on the instant he returned. There must be a million things that also happened in that same instant. Why don't I think of *them?* Why?"

Because Jones is the only other event you know of.

"All right, then. Someone at the power center was asleep at the switch. A busted wire or cable was just repaired. Atomic fallout was dampering electric conduction in certain areas. Or my Gloria-fantasy melted the tubes."

"You're getting ashes on the carpet."

Craig hastily tapped the grey ash from the glowing tip of his cigarette, over the ash-tray, took another drag, then crunched out the butt. "So what could Jones possibly have to do with the failure in function of those things?"

"Why not try and find out just that?"

"How? said Craig. "Use a rubber hose on him?"

"Oh . . .Take a look around in his apartment, when he's out, for instance."

"Don't be silly. In the first place, you go to jail for that sort of thing. In the second, Jones is always at home."

"Always? How about when something breaks down?"

"Well, he's never been in whenever I stopped by to complain about the heat, or falling plaster."

"He was out tonight. When he should have been here to help."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Hell, that was *my* fault. I came home earlier than usual to catch that program."

Craig almost stopped thinking altogether at the implication of what he'd said.

"Go on," said his mind. *"Pursue the thought!"*

"Well . . ." Craig was hesitant, tremulous. "Maybe he— maybe he makes it a point to be here whenever any of the tenants are here, to— to—"

"To keep electrical devices functioning?"

"That's a very ridiculous thought. The *lights* worked."

"The lighting comes from elsewhere in the city. Perhaps the city's Light and Power Company has an Abel Jones of its own . . ."

"Oh, come on, Lescort, snap *out* of it!" Craig said, almost chuckling. "Take a cold shower and go back to bed."

"Why not wait till Jones is asleep and try the TV?"

"It's after two A.M. The programs are off."

"You're making excuses. An all-night radio show."

"All right, I will. Just to show you!"

Craig got up from the bed, and crossed to his bedroom window, where a wide airshaft gave him a vertical view of a concrete-floored enclosure. He could just see the glow coming from the bed-room window of Abel Jones' room. He waited, watching . . .

By four A.M., Craig had a small pyramid of cigarette butts on the cement windowsill before him, and the glow was still coming from Jones' room.

"You're being an idiot!" he told himself.

Then Jones' light went out.

"Damn," said Craig, feeling suddenly cold and queasy. "I'll give him a half-hour to get to sleep."

At four-thirty, Craig turned on the radio. It was silent. He waited for it to warm up, but nothing happened. His hand shaking ever so slightly, he swung the selector from band to band, trying to pick up something, anything.

"Well?" said his mind.

"This is crazy," Craig muttered, sagging into his easy chair. "It doesn't make sense!"

"You've got to admit it, Craig. There is something wrong!"

"But what could possibly—"

The radio went on, startling Craig so that he nearly cried out in alarm. Then a tingling, near-hilarious relief swept through him. "There!" he said to himself. "How do you explain that?"

"Before you turn handsprings, take a look out the window."

Craig looked. Jones' light was on again.

Slowly, Craig closed the window, then returned to the parlor

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and shut off the radio. His hands were so damp with perspiration that he could hardly move the beveled knob to the "off" position. Shuddering, his body at a temperature he would have welcomed in a humid midsummer under any other circumstances, he crawled between the sheets. But he didn't get any sleep. And for once, it wasn't because his brain was clogged with Gloria Gonzales.

On his way to work the next morning, his eyes deep-shadowed and red, he passed Jones in the lower hall. The superintendent, a middle-aged stringbean of a man with a full head of curly gray hair, seemed to be staring at Craig with an unwonted intensity.

"Good morning, Mister Lescort," was all he said.

Something froze inside Craig's heart, jamming the chambers with jagged ice. *He wants to hear my voice!* he said to himself. *He's trying to hear any deviation in my voice, to hear if I—if I know . . .* All this passed through his consciousness in a timeless moment, even before Jones had closed his mouth on the last syllable. Craig knew it was impossible to speak normally, with the irking coldness inside his body. *Then speak* abnormally, *you jerk! his* mind shouted. *But an* acceptable *abnormality!*

"Say, Jones!" said Craig, a mild edge on his normally pleasant voice. "I wish you'd check the wiring in my apartment! I had the devil's own time trying to get anything to work last night!"

Jones' face changed, hearing the tone of Craig's voice. A certain tautness left it, and was briefly replaced by relief, which gave way even as it appeared, to a more suitable expression of near-sycophantic concern.

"Gee, I'm terribly sorry, Mister Lescort," he said, his tone ringing with sincerity. "I'll check up on it right away." His voice was confident and soothing.

"Thanks," said Craig, and was out the door.

Outside, moving toward the corner and the bus for work, he felt an extension of the cold inside him, its sneaking rime getting into every vein, spreading until he was nearly shuddering despite the very warmth of the morning sunlight. "I'm being a fool," he told himself.

He repeated this to himself twenty minutes later, as he got off the bus many blocks from his usual stop, in front of the Public Library. Gloria could wait a bit.

"A damned fool!" he muttered, but climbed the wide granite steps and went inside the cool, silent interior.

It was noon before he reap-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

peared, his back and neck stiff with tiny aches, his face preoccupied as his hands automatically fumbled for and ignited a much-needed cigarette. He'd been spot-checking every science book he found on the shelves, trying to dissuade his mind from its determined path. But his findings had abetted, rather than abashed, the weird hypothesis burgeoning in his brain.

Like a somnambulist, he passed down the wide stone staircase and strolled aimlessly, his thoughts a tangled, kaleidoscopic maelstrom of eerie apprehension.

"You see?" said his mind, as he scuffed blindly down the sidewalk and into a small, quiet park, *"Despite the manifold explanations as to* how *modern-day gadgets work, there's not a single sentence in those books stating* why!"

"Don't be ridiculous," Craig countered weakly, "why does *anything* work?"

"Exactly my point!" said his mind, eagerly. *"What's electricity? Science* admits *to not really knowing. It's occasioned by a forced electron imbalance, causing a flow of electrons through a wire. But* why?"

"Because—" Craig muttered, sinking onto a dull green wooden bench beside the path, "It just *is*, that's all!"

"Tell me sincerely, is that a scientific answer?"

"I—" Craig mumbled hopelessly, then stopped. It was a *very* weak answer. It was not even an answer; it was an alibi. "Well, it's a sort of mystery, like radio, or—"

"Or gravity," his mind persisted. *"Two objects are attracted to one another directly as the product of their masses—"* it paused. *"Not unlike you and Gloria."*

"Yeh, yeh!" said Craig, impatiently. "And inversely as the square of the distance between their centers. That's elementary physics. And pretty damned scientific, too!"

"Is it?" his mind pursued, implacably. *"It certainly tells* what *they do. Does it tell* why *they do it?"*

"Well—" he suggested, "Why am *I* attracted to *Gloria?"*

"Who knows what magnetism is?" his mind interrupted.

"It's the force that— that—" Craig sputtered.

"How much Uranium 235 constitutes a critical mass?"

"That's a governmental secret!" Craig protested.

"Don't the enemy nations have the bomb?" asked his mind. *"Haven't we proof of their nuclear blasts?"*

"Well, yes, but—"

"Then why the secrecy?" his mind asked smugly.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Because . . ." Craig's voice trailed off. "Why, indeed?"

"What holds a plane up?"

"Easy. Air flow over the curved surface of the topside of the wing, faster than the air flow under it. It creates a lift, and—"

"Then how does a plane fly upside down?"

"Why—uh—buoyancy. The lift keeps it from—"

His mind didn't even reply to that one.

"Well, damn it then, what *is* the answer?" Craig demanded of his mind.

"What if there were no such thing as science?" his mind asked, quickly, without warning.

"No . . . such . . . thing . . ." Craig could barely comprehend the significance of the words. "That's impossible. Science *works,* doesn't it? What matter if *I* don't understand why? Isn't the fact that it *does* work enough?"

"Is *it enough?"* asked his mind from a hollow inner distance. *"Is it?"*

The cigarette burned Craig's fingers, and he dropped it, grinding out its glowing tip beneath his shoe on the asphalt path. He couldn't think straight. He simply sat and watched, observed the world about him. Across the path from the bench was a rolling, grassy field. Children were playing there, flying their gaily colored kites on the breast of a warmly persistent breeze. Some of the kites were mere dots in the brilliant blue sky overhead, riding the wind like soaring hawks. Others, despite the determined lengthening or pruning of tails, spun weakly in the air behind their galloping masters, and refused to take to the skies.

Craig's thoughts flowed backward to his own childhood. Tops that should have spun and didn't. Hurtling baseballs that rebounded from plate glass windows without breaking them. Dizzying drops that might have shattered bones but did not. Footballs that refused to spiral when they were passed. Little things. Unimportant things. Kid things. But all of them based on scientific principle . . .

Should not science work in *all* cases? Without deviation?

And yet, there'd been children who had the "knack" of making things work. And others that, try though they might, could not bring about the most minute success in their own endeavors. Unless, of course, one of the other kids showed them how—

Something clammy laid cold hands on Craig's spine. "I'm not thinking science . . ." he realized aloud. "I'm thinking *witchcraft!"*

"Funny you should mention

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that," said his mind, abruptly leaping back into the conversation, *"because* I *was just thinking along those very lines!"*

"Wh- What lines?" Craig gasped, suddenly intent.

"Do *things work? Or are there those who* make *them work?"*

The sunlight remained bright and golden, and the wind blew as warmly, and the sky glowed as blue as before. But Craig was suddenly chilled to the bone, trembling like a derelict with advanced DTs. Which, at this point, he wished he had. "This is crazy," he whispered, hoarsely. "You're talking medieval superstition, sorcery, necromancy—"

"When," said his emotionless inner mind, *"did the fear of, and historical appearances of, black magic disappear?"*

"You're talking fantasy!" Craig shuddered, weakly.

"The Bible warns against sorcerors . . ." said his mind.

"Science doesn't believe in the Bible!" Craig said, so loudly that an elderly couple passing by arm in arm paused to stare at him before continuing.

"Those who step into the shadows of necromancy, rather, avoid *the Bible!"* said his mind, ominously. *"Don't evade the issue:* When *did superstition begin to fade?"*

"Well," Craig tried hard to recall, "it was about—"

"No, no," said his mind, irritably. *"Not the year. The era."*

"The upswing in scientific enlightenment?" Craig said, slowly. "Science comes in, witchcraft goes out?"

"Precisely," said his mind. *"Only what if it wasn't really a new enlightenment? What if it was simply more of the same?"*

"For that—" Craig answered, "—the witches, warlocks and other weird-folk would have had to *organize,* to—to *make up* scientific terminology. Why should they—"

"To hoodwink the populace. The normal *populace. To convince the people that these things —the near-miraculous inventions of our age—were* natural *phenomena!"*

Craig shook his head and grinned weakly. "It sounds goofy, but, from a witch's point of view . . ."

"She'd be burnt at the stake for taking a midnight broomride. But who'd raise an eyebrow at an old lady hopping the 11:45 plane for Amarillo?"

Craig got to his feet and began to walk, his hands jammed deep in his pockets. "Let me think!" he moaned. "Let me *think!"*

He was walking automatically, swiftly, not watching his course. All manner of memories were returning to him, each adding to the frosty fears that lengthened

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

icy fingers throughout his body. He remembered a radio, a car radio, that wouldn't work. He'd discovered a broken wire beneath the insulation while trying to fix it himself to avoid paying a repair bill. He'd taken it in, and the radio had been repaired, and the bill had itemized the replacement of two tubes, nothing more. He'd not thought of the discrepancy until he'd been driving along a country road, with the radio actually playing. Then all at once, he'd said, "Why, they never mentioned fixing that *wire!*" and at that instant, the radio had stopped again. Completely dead. He'd not been able to get another peep out of it. He hadn't returned it, nor had he complained. He'd sold the car the following month. He wasn't sure why . . .

A little thing, insignificant in itself. But, taken along with similar examples, it presented a picture that evoked shivering wonder in Craig's mind. It was nutty, but—

All at once, he looked about him, took note that he was nearly back at his apartment.

The realization halted him in mid-stride like a hand against his chest. He wasn't yet ready to face Abel Jones, not until his thoughts were settled on this question. And perhaps not even then . . .

"It's a wonder nobody ever realized this before," he said, pondering his next move. "All these years, there should have been someone other than myself who investigated along these lines . . ."

"If witch-power is the force that motivates modern-day machinery," said his mind, without warning, *"How then can one explain mechanical failure? . . ."*

Craig brightened. But of course. There it was, simple as that. If magic were running things, there couldn't be mechanical failures, because the machinery was not actually functioning of itself. Easy as that.

The day seemed warmer and sunnier, all at once, and Craig was nearly laughing at his earlier trepidations. He—realized, with a grimace of wry humor, that his shirt and suit were damp with fear-inspired perspiration.

"Idiot," he said scornfully to himself. "Look at you. Nearly a gibbering wreck because of a simple power failure last night. Those things happen, you know."

"Probably a loose wire," said his mind, with a bare hint of mockery in its tone. *"Or too many horror films."*

"Go to hell," said Craig, taking up his stride again toward the apartment. "And when you get there, stay."

A shower, fresh clothes, may-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be even the luxury of a barber-shop shave, and he'd be ready to face life again. Maybe even a date tonight. What *was* the name of that *Boheme* aria? He could mention it on the phone to Gloria. She'd been awfully good-looking across the lunch table in the company cafeteria . . . Craig wondered how she'd look over champagne cocktails by candlelight.

He entered his apartment building, and took the stairway up to his floor. As his hand reached for the knob, he froze into immobility, his forehead puckered with a frown.

"What if—" he began, then tried to suppress the thought. But his mind was too strong for him.

"What if that which you took to be the answer to one question were actually the answer to another?" said his mind, warningly.

Craig was too scared to reply.

"What if," his mind went on relentlessly, *"the introduction of mechanical failure into your theory did not explain away witch-power, but only explained precisely what happened to others who discovered sorcery behind science?"*

A thousand memories flashed through Craig's mind at once. Dropping elevators. Planes that vanished from man's ken in mid-flight. Brakes that malfunctioned at railroad crossings. The *Titanic*—the "un-sinkable" ship—plunging to hideous doom on its maiden voyage . . .

"Good grief . . ." Craig murmured, weakly.

"If Jones should find out that you *found out—"* his mind didn't have to finish the statement.

"He can't," Craig insisted. "I—I can move away, to a new apartment. I don't have to face him, I—"

"What about the cigarettes?"

"Yipe!" said Craig, recalling the telltale pyramid of butts he'd left on the windowsill. If Jones had come across them—

He fumbled his key into the lock and twisted the door open. The apartment was silent. Gingerly, he tiptoed into his bedroom, then rushed to the window and flung it up. The sill was clean, without the slight trace of his night's vigil. Craig swallowed with difficulty and shut the window. "Maybe— Maybe a breeze?"

"That airshaft is breezy as a coal mine," said his mind. *"If they're gone, they've been removed."*

Craig scurried back into the parlor and put the slender—hopelessly slender—chain on the door. "There!" he said hopefully.

"There?" said his mind. *"Where? Are Jones and his ilk locked out, or are you locked in? You are on* Jones' *premises."*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Oh, damn!" said Craig, and unhooked the chain.

As he did so, there was a hesitant knock at the door.

Craig stood there stupidly, his thoughts jumbled. The knock was repeated. "Who— Who is it?" he forced out.

"Abel Jones," said the superintendent. "May I see you for a minute, Mister Lescort?"

"What about?" said Craig, warily.

There was a pause on the other side of the door, then Jones said, "About the wonders of modern science."

Craig stiffened, then, in frantic defiance, put the chain back on the door. "You can't come in," he said, but before he could close his mouth on the phrase, Jones came walking in through the wood of the door. "How did you do *that?*" Craig marveled, too intrigued to be terrified.

"It wasn't easy," Jones admitted, wiping a few beads of sweat from his thin-skinned bony brow. "I've come to discuss an 'arrangement' with you."

Craig, fairly certain that the 'arrangement' consisted of electrocution, exploding TV tubes, or worse, shook his head. "No, please— Look, Mister Jones, I don't know what you think I've found out about witchcraft and all, but I haven't, really. I imagined the whole thing, see? I never learned anything about what you were doing." He added, inanely, "And I'll never tell."

Jones stared at him, bewildered, then a light dawned in his eyes. "Mister Lescort . . . You think that we would 'take steps'?"

"*Wouldn't* you?" asked Craig. "I know all about your falling elevators and sinking ships and missing aircraft."

Jones blinked. "Then . . . *you* know more than *I* do! What are you talking about?"

Craig told him. By the time he'd finished, Jones was shaking his head, a helpless grin on his homely features.

"It hasn't changed," he sighed. "The same old story: Witches are magical, ergo dangerous. Get them before they get us. Decapitate them, impale them, burn them!" Jones made a wry face. "Mister Lescort, in the whole history of witchcraft, who always gets the dirty end of the stick?"

Craig thought that one over, and a funny thought came to him. "The witches?" he said.

"Exactly," said Abel Jones. "If we *were* so gosh-awful insidious, wouldn't *we* have burnt the *normals* at the stake, not vice-versa?"

"I never thought of it that way," Craig admitted.

"We just try to go along, minding our own business, kind

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of staying out of sight, but somebody is always popping up and spoiling things. Honestly, we don't mean *anyone* any harm. Do you honestly think we'd have to bump off a *boatload* of people to get at *one* person who knew about us? Those things are just accident. We usually work in teams, so that one can keep things running while the other sleeps. Now and then, unfortunately, the one on duty dozes off, or gets out of range; our range is rather small. We need at least one to a building, or one to a boat. There *are* some of us up on the necromantic scale, however, that can handle a city block, but they're a rarity."

"Then you have a sort of—'Assistant Janitor' in the building?" Craig marveled.

"Certainly. One of the other tenants. But—" he held up a warning forefinger, "I can't tell you who."

"And my early homecoming caught you unawares. Is that it?"

Jones nodded. "Took me completely off guard."

"Then," Craig exulted, "you're not here to kill me?"

Jones gaped. "Heavens, no! I came here to purchase your silence. That's all."

"Purchase my—" Craig scratched his head. "But look, what would happen if I *didn't* promise silence?— Just *curious*, is all, Jones— What would you do then?"

"Frankly, I don't know," said Jones. "No one's ever turned down our offer before."

"Say—" Craig said, suddenly excited, "just what *is* your offer?"

"The usual," said Jones. "Granting your fondest wish. Most everybody has *something* they want and can't get by ordinary means."

"Hey!" Craig said delightedly, "there's a girl I—"

Jones shook his head. "No abductions, sorry. We wouldn't want the F.B.I. getting onto us."

"Well, how about—"

"Sorry. Love potions violate the Pure Food and Drug Act."

Craig wilted. "Well, could you at least—"

"Nope. Making you irresistable to women would negate our contracts with the deodorant companies; we're not in TV and radio for our *health*, you know! Where do you think they get those enchanting perfumes, invisible shields, and miracle tips?"

"Well," Craig asked humbly, what *can* you do?"

"What interests does she have?" asked Jones, hopefully.

"Opera," said Craig. "Especially *La Boheme*."

"H'mm," said Jones. "Okay, close your eyes— Can't have you watching the mystic passes."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Craig closed his eyes. Suddenly, there was a sensation not unlike having a feather-footed ant colony swarm up his body from arches to pompadour. "Brr!" he shuddered, then the feeling passed. He opened his eyes.

Jones was dusting off his hands. "All set, Mister Lescort. You now know more about opera than Gino Prado. Pity the quiz shows have shut down."

"And I've just solved the mystery of the ages, too," said Craig. "It isn't: The janitor's missing because there's work to do. There's work to do because the janitor's missing."

Miss Gloria Gonzales dwelt on the seventeenth floor of a newly built apartment building on the East Side. A few casual mentions of *La Scala, L'Opera Comique,* and the Met had had Gloria smiling at Craig all day at the office. He'd offered to bring over some of his complete opera scores to play on her Hi-Fi that evening, and she had accepted the offer with ardent alacrity.

She'd met him at the door in "something comfortable," the better to enjoy their melodic idyll without silly encumbrances like girdles and such. Her idea of comfort was black lace over pink silk, liberally sprayed with some musky scent that made Craig's fingers flex with desire. But first he put the records on the machine.

Side by side on the tiny sofa, they held hands and listened to beautiful music. Then Craig turned to Gloria, stared deeply into her devastating brown eyes, and whispered huskily, "That *arpeggio con molto* was just a little bit off key, I think. It lacked the resonance so necessary to the complete enjoyment of sonic stimulation."

Gloria's eyes glazed a little, and she said, "Huh? Oh, yeh-sure."

"I have noticed," said Craig, warming to his topic, "that there is a regrettable tendency in modern-day opera stars to sacrifice pronunciation for pitch, thus striking the correct tone, but sadly neglecting conveying the words to the ears of the listener. Now, as everyone knows, the *purpose* of opera, its *raison d'etre,* is a blend between words and music. Otherwise, music-lovers would settle for straight instrumental solos. So I feel that any loss of clarity in the opera lyric is contrary to the purpose for which—for which—"

Miss Gloria Gonzales's deep bosom was heaving up and down, and her breath came in soft gasps between her ripe cherry lips. Unfortunately, it was not passion that evoked this reaction. Gloria was sound

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

asleep, brainwashed by boredom.

Craig shook her. Nothing. He tried calling her name. No dice. He even ventured pinching her, gently. She squirmed a little, then relapsed into sound slumber.

"H'mm," thought Craig. "Asleep. Helpless. Alone here with me . . ."

He slipped his arm behind her shoulders, lifted her head, and lowered his lips almost upon hers, tingling as he felt the warm breath issuing between them upon his mouth. Then he set her back, gently, shaking his head.

"Don't be a cad, Lescort," he muttered, "this is taking unfair advantage. Besides, you need more of a reaction to enjoy yourself. It'd be like fondling a plastic mannequin."

He shook her again, called her name, even tried chafing her wrists. No response. Just silence. The apartment itself was as quiet at an abandoned grave.

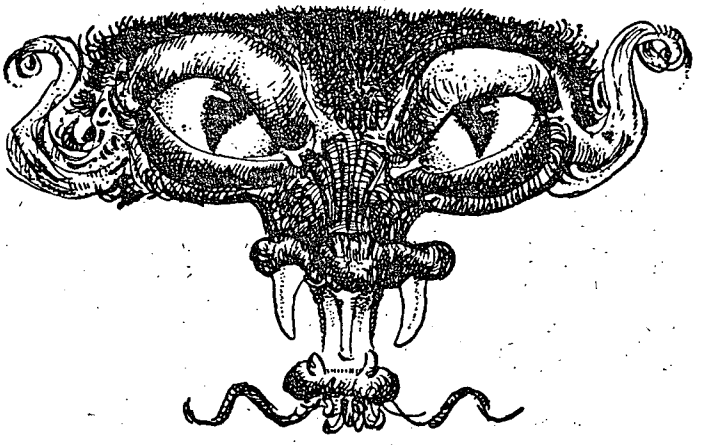
Craig sighed. "Well, there'll be other times." With a gallant bow to her recumbent form, he picked up his hat and tiptoed from the apartment. Just as he stepped into the waiting elevator, he realized that he'd forgotten his new-bought opera recordings.

And realized that, though the phonograph should have been playing, the apartment had been silent when he'd left.

'Good grief!" he gasped. "What if *Gloria* were the *Assistant Janitor?*"

But then the thought left his mind. He was too busy trying to cope with a seventeen-floor plunge in a mal-functioning elevator.

THE END



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CLIP AND MAIL THE COUPON BELOW...

YOU'LL RECEIVE THE NEXT NINE MONTHS OF FANTASTIC —THE MOST EXCITING FANTASY AND SCIENCE-FICTION MAGAZINE PUBLISHED

FOR ONLY $2 *that's the equivalent of more than three issues* FREE!

Compared to the 35¢-a-copy price, this offer brings you the next nine months of FANTASTIC for just 23¢ a copy—a saving of $1.15... actually more than 3 issues FREE!

And during the next nine months, you're in store for the finest fantasy-science fiction being published anywhere... works of such fantasy greats as Henry Slesar, A. Bertram Chandler, John Wyndham, Randall Garrett, Rog Phillips and Gordon Dickson. There will also be an occasional vintage masterpiece by one of the great fantasy writers of the past.

Now's the time to insure your future copies, and save money at the same time. Fill in the coupon below and mail it today for the best deal you'll ever get to FANTASTIC—nine months for only $2!

FANTASTIC ○ 434 South Wabash Avenue ○ Chicago 5, Illinois

Send me 9 issues of FANTASTIC at the Special Introductory rate of only $2.00 (regular rate $3.50 a year).

☐ Payment enclosed—send all 9 issues.
☐ I'll pay when billed—send 8 issues.

NOTE: LONG-TERM OFFER FOR EXTRA SAVINGS!
18 issues only $3.75
☐ Payment enclosed—*send 18 issues.*
☐ Send 16 issues and bill me later.

NAME _____

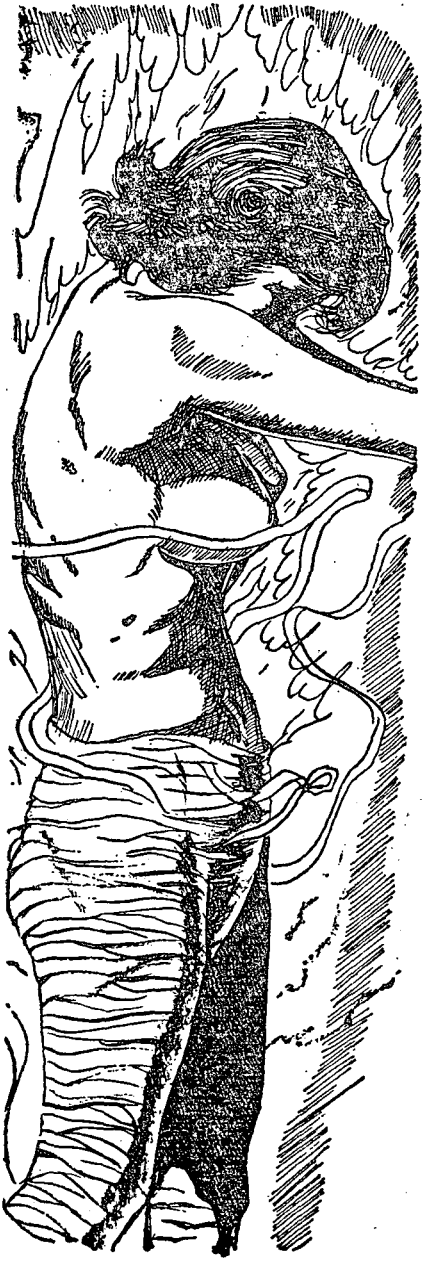
ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ ZONE ____ STATE _____

(Additional postage for addresses not in U. S. or Canada: 50¢ per year for Pan American countries; $1 per year for all other foreign.) 10-60

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Woman on Fire

By EDWARD LUDWIG

During her rise to Hollywood stardom, Gloria Manfield had often been referred to by knowing producers and directors as "hot stuff." How right they were!

"CALIFORNIANS," averred Mrs. Gabriel Horn, "are mad as geese, wild as monkeys, savage as—"

"Savages," supplied Dr. Gabriel Horn.

"Exactly." Mrs. Horn released a Gargantuan sigh and plopped herself into a chair before the fireplace. "Sometimes I wonder if we should have left New Hampshire—although the weather here is pleasant."

"Yes, that would be nice for dinner. A welcome change."

"*Pleasant, not pheasant.* I said the WEATHER IS PLEASANT."

"Oh yes," replied the doctor, smoothing his bristling white brows. "Ideal for geraniums even in winter. You'll never find

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

geraniums blooming in New Hampshire in the winter."

"But your patients—" The big woman shuddered. "That horrible yogi whose power of clairvoyance was slipping, and that ugly little Mr. Riddlemeyer who said he was being eaten by invisible lizards. Why do such people come to *you?*"

"It must be the name—Dr. Gabriel Horn. Californians don't seem to realize I'm just a general practitioner. They seem to think I'm something else."

"It's ridiculous. In New Hampshire—"

Tiring, Dr. Horn switched off his hearing aid with an adroit, surreptitious motion and confined further participation in the discussion to an occasional nod.

At length he strode to the large picture window of the living room. He was tall and gaunt and with a wiry mane of snow-white hair. Thoughtfully, he gazed outward, like an aged, withered, but indestructible lion.

Perhaps, he reflected, the decision to move to Southern California had been unwise. But although he'd had no competition in New Hampshire's tiny River Junction, his practice there had mysteriously declined to an alarming extent. Too, the icy winters had become an ever-increasing source of discomfort to his old bones. Consequently, he and Mrs. Horn developed an inclination to spend the shaky remainder of their lives in warmth and sunlight.

Their natures were such that decisions were easily made. Storms of adversities and uncertainties that might overwhelm many of the human species were to them as gentle mists. So they tossed their belongings into a small satchel and set forth into the western land of enchantment.

As an assurance against boredom, Dr. Horn made the proper arrangements with California medical authorities (who for a time were inexplicably hesitant) and at last hung his battered shingle in the front yard of his suburban cottage. Being long past the age of retirement, he desired only a cursory practice to alternate with the development of his geranium bed.

His thoughts were interrupted by the sight of a red Cadillac convertible pulling to a stop before the cottage. Somone in its front seat was bending forward, apparently studying the shingle.

"Ha!" exclaimed the good doctor, switching on his hearing aid. "A patient!"

Mrs. Horn waddled away into the kitchen mumbling, "Wonder what it'll be this time," and a moment later the doorbell rang.

Dr. Horn opened the door and gasped.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Goodness," he thought, recalling the H. G. Wells classic. "An invisible woman!"

The figure before him, tall and slender and pleasantly curvaceous, was dressed in an expensive-looking red-checked coat, black slacks, and red, toeless spike-heeled pumps. Her hair was concealed by a black scarf drawn in a tight knot beneath her chin. She wore dark glasses, frames somehow suggestive of a Siamese cat, and her face was swathed in bandages. Not an atom of flesh or hair remained visible.

"Dr. Horn?" The throaty voice sifted through the bandages.

"Yes, yes." An invisible woman, thought the doctor. Most interesting. Extremely interesting.

The woman entered, carrying a large bucket filled with water. Hummm, thought the doctor.

"I—I don't know if you can help me, darling," said the woman, "but your name made me hope that you might succeed where others have failed."

"The name does carry certain connotations."

The woman's head jerked fearfully from side to side. "It's horrible, darling. I'm nearly insane."

"Yes, I'll do all I can to ease your pain. Just what's the trouble?" Inwardly, the doctor chuckled. As if he didn't already know!

"You'll keep what you see a secret?"

"Of course."

The husky-voiced woman nodded. She placed the bucket of water on the floor and began to unbutton her coat.

Dr. Horn deposited himself in an easy chair, settled back and laced his fingertips. Despite his outward appearance of academic objectivity, his viscera were bubbling with anticipation. Soon he'd be seeing apparently unoccupied garments floating through the air like frozen laundry caught in a whirlwind. What an exhilarating experience!

The woman slipped off her coat and slacks, and Dr. Horn perceived that she was wrapped in a wet sheet, torn so that strands wound around her legs. A few drops of moisture trickled to the floor. Oddly, wisps of steam rose from the sheet.

Next she removed her dark glasses and head-scarf and began to loosen her facial bandages which, the doctor noted, were also quite wet. She paused dramatically. "Ready, darling?"

"Ready."

Like an animated mummy, she peeled off the wet, steaming bandages. Round and round went her hands until Dr. Horn became a trifle dizzy. At last her face and head were bare. She kicked off her shoes. In a swift, climactic gesture, she swept aside the sheet and hurled it to the floor.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She stood naked and trembling before the good doctor.

Dr. Horn blinked watery eyes. "By Jove, old girl, you seem to be on fire."

"Yes, darling, on fire." The words were charged with agony and despair.

"Yes, I can see you're not a liar. Hummm. Unusual."

The doctor felt considerable disappointment in not encountering an invisible woman. Yet the situation now confronting him, he decided, was not without interest. After sixty years of practice, he couldn't recall having had another case like it.

The woman was literally on fire. She was cloaked in flame that extended, on the average, five or six inches from her body. It burned quietly and steadily, like that from a gas burner, emitting only an occasional puff of dark smoke. It was brightest about her rather hippy waist, her breasts and cheeks; yet flesh and hair appeared unharmed. Dr. Horn received the impression that the flame was attached to her body rather than emanating from it.

Beneath the flames, the doctor noted, the woman was not unattractive. He estimated her age to be a well-preserved thirty-seven or thirty-eight. Her skin looked smooth and unblemished. Her long legs were slim, well-proportioned, and firm-looking. Her hair (unless unnaturally colored by the flames) was a tawny-brown; and, although certain portions of her anatomy would have benefitted somewhat by application of a girdle, the doctor on the whole regretted that the activity of the flames hindered detailed observation of her finer features.

The woman said, huskily, "Y—you'll try to help me? You'll not turn me away?"

"The Hippocratic oath forbids me from turning away a patient, and we shan't even discuss my fee yet. I assume you'd like your present condition remedied?"

The woman nodded, eyes wild and wide. "In the name of Heaven, I do. My clothing's burnt to a crisp within seconds. If I leave home, I have to douse my sheet with water every five minutes. The heat is unbearable. I'd give half of my estate for a drink of ice water. The coldest water turns to steam before it touches my throat."

Dr. Horn reflected that such an affliction would be invaluable in curtailing heating expenses during a New Hampshire winter. "You must tell me how this singular condition came about," he crackled.

The woman splashed a few drops of water on an ignited spot in Mrs. Horn's hardwood floor.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Then she began: "First I must tell you who I am. I'm Gloria Manfield."

"Oh yes," said Dr. Horn, noting that some sign of recognition was expected. "Loria Fanfeel."

"I caught a cold two weeks ago. Served me right, I suppose, for not getting the proper rest—not that I *really* overdo, darling, but an actress *must* be seen in the proper places. So I took pink pills and drank only screwdrivers—for the orange juice, you know. The cold got worse. I had three TV appearances to handle and was scheduled to start shooting on 'Passion Flower of Pluto' for Super Films."

Her voice trailed wistfully. "About two a.m. last Friday my servants found me on the floor by the bar—er, bed. I'd passed out. Doctors came. Bronchial pneumonia."

She shuddered. "They put me in bed under an oxygen tent. Someone was holding my pulse. Finally I heard a voice say, 'It's all over. The old bag's going.'

"The rest was nightmare. Darkness closed in. I felt a floating sensation. My body seemed to have no weight. Then I saw —" Her lips quivered.

"You saw—?" prompted Dr. Horn.

"I—I saw Satan."

"Goodness," murmured the doctor, his lean figure stiffening.

"He was like all the evil in the universe materialized in flame. It was as if he and I were alone in a crimson void, as if all his evil energies were directed at me alone. I tried to scream, but my voice was paralyzed. He came closer, towering over me like a colossus. His hand reached down to seize me. In the glare of those gigantic eyes was the promise of an eternity of agony.

"But I'm not a mild woman, darling. In my early days, I traveled with dance bands—one-night stands and all that. I had more than a taste of burlesque. When I got my first movie role—well, a girl *has* to do things sometimes to get ahead.

"Anyway, some of that toughness remained. I thought of the swarm of stupid sisters back in Twin Forks who'd inherit my dough, my yacht, my country home, my control of Manfield Enterprises. I'd be damned if I'd let this monstrosity get me. I turned and ran. It was like fighting my way through a maze of crimson cotton. I was trying to find a door that led back to earth, to life. If the door wasn't there, I was trying to create one through the strength of my will."

Dr. Horn interrupted: "No, don't worry a bit about my bill. We'll discuss that at the conclusion of your case."

Gloria Manfield, breathing heavily, went on: "He towered

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

over me. His fiery hand streaked down, closed over me as a flaming net might swoop onto a fly. The heat and smoke nauseated me. I began to retch, but still I fought. I kept struggling to find that door.

"Then, through the smoke I caught a glimpse of Earth, of green fields and buildings. I seemed to be hovering in space far above the planet. I kept fighting, and the hand held me in its grasp.

"Finally I felt a falling sensation. I lost consciousness. I awoke in my bed, at home. My pneumonia was gone. I'd defeated death. But doctors and nurses ran screaming from the room. I was on fire. The hand of Satan was—and is—still about me."

"Hummm," mused Dr. Horn. "A most disconcerting experience. However, I believe that for every ill there is a remedy. In this case, I shall do my best to devise one."

He folded his hands and closed his eyes. Obviously, the treatment would of necessity be somewhat unorthodox. An idea struck him, and he weighed it in his mind.

At last he said, crisply, "I'm going to suggest a simple remedy. I want you to visit a church and obtain a considerable quantity of holy water. A bathtub full would be preferable. Bathe yourself in it. Perhaps we can frighten the hand of Satan away from you."

"Shall I use soap, darling?"

"Immaterial. If the treatment isn't successful, I'll have something else arranged for tomorrow. And don't worry about my fee. Until tomorrow, then?"

Gloria Manfield dampened her sheet, resumed her guise, and left.

Mrs. Gabriel Horn tromped into the room, a trace of a snarl on her lips. "Another *patient?*"

"Yes. I'd hoped at first that she was an invisible woman."

Mrs. Horn eyes widened. "And was she?"

"No. She was on fire."

"Oh. Well, that's just as bad."

"Yes, it *is* sad. But the case is markedly unusual, so much so that I forgot to show Miss Fanpeel my geraniums."

Mrs. Horn snorted. "Well, I'm warning you. If you don't have more luck with her than with that yogi and that terrible Mr. Riddlemeyer and his invisible lizards, so help me, we're moving back to New Hampshire!"

The next day Gloria Manfield appeared still equipped with bucket, sheet, bandages, and goggles.

Silently, she undressed. A sliver of flame squeezed here and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

there through the bandages, ominous symbols of Dr. Horn's failure. At length she stood naked before the good doctor.

"I did as you said, darling. I got a whole barrel of water from St. Anne's. I dumped it in my bathtub and sank into it up to my nose. Nothing happened."

"Nothing at all?" asked Dr. Horn sadly.

"Except that it sizzled."

"Ah?"

"The water sizzled and began to boil. Within ten minutes it was gone."

"You're sure it was properly blessed?"

"Positive."

Dr. Horn pursed his lips. "At least we've learned that our opponent isn't one to be easily frightened. I now suggest a more subtle approach to the problem. You've suggested that your life hasn't been especially virtuous?"

The woman's eyes narrowed. "If you're referring to those incidents with my third and fourth husbands, those shootings were in self-defense. Both juries—"

"Miss Fanpeel. I was referring to virtue in a somewhat broader sense."

"Oh. Well, darling, I told you a girl sometimes has to do things to get on in the world."

"Yes, in other words, your life has been such that Satan has first claim on your soul. Perhaps we can change the situation. Perhaps you can do something so that Satan will no longer want you."

"What?"

The good doctor stroked his chin. "You mentioned having money, a yacht, a home, your Fanpeel Enterprises. Very well, we'll turn you into a philanthropist. Give away your money, your yacht, your Fanpeel Enterprises. Make donations to charity, to medical research, to all worthy causes."

Gloria Manfield trembled. "Give it *all* away?"

"Leave enough to cover present expenses such as doctor bills."

"I also have a warehouse of 20-year-old bonded bourbon in Boston and a few stockpiles of beer here and there—seven hundred kegs, for example, in Kansas City."

"Yes, my dear, your legs are quite pretty. I've been admiring them for quite some time."

"I said I'd like to keep my supplies of bourbon and beer!"

The good doctor adjusted his hearing aid. "Oh yes, certainly—but nothing more, mind you, with the exception of an ample amount for doctor bills and such."

Gloria Manfield straightened. "All right, doctor. I'll have my attorneys make the arrangements at once."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Excellent!"

Gloria Manfield left in a whirlwind of grim-faced determination.

Then Dr. Horn scowled. "Goodness," he exclaimed. His memory was certainly not what it used to be. For the second time, he'd forgotten to show Miss Fanpeel his geranium bed.

"My table is utterly *ruined*," grumbled Mrs. Horn the next day "It'll need a complete job of scraping and staining. And look at my floor! Wherever that woman stands, she makes burns. Whenever she's here, it takes an hour to clear the smoke out of the house."

Dr. Horn turned off his hearing aid. His wife's chin became like a trap door flapping crazily in a silent wind.

"By Jove, she must be talking loudly," he thought after a few seconds. "I can *still* hear her."

". . . your last day with her." Mrs. Horn's voice came faintly, like an echo. "Unless you cure her today, you're going to dismiss her, fee or no fee. Do you hear me, Gabriel? Today is your last chance. I'm going shopping. When I get back, I want that woman gone from this house for good!"

Dr. Horn thought he heard the doorbell. "Dear, I believe she's coming—"

"And don't you forget it!"

In came a bucket and a sheet and bandages and goggles and Gloria Manfield. There was a disrobing and an unwinding and a smoking and a fiery brightness.

The woman stared like a lost, helpless child.

"I can hardly believe it," murmured the good doctor, turning up his hearing aid. "I thought surely *he'd* release you if you—you *did* give away your money and things, didn't you?"

"The whole goddam works, darling—everything except the bourbon and beer."

Dr. Horn hunched forward. "And enough for doctor bills and such?"

"Yes, darling."

The good doctor sighed and sank back in his chair. Then he frowned. He'd failed; and since Mrs. Horn was a woman of her word, he had only one more chance. The thought occurred to him that he might obtain some books at the library on black magic and occultism, but he had little inclination to handle nasty things like frog legs and graveyard dirt.

Suddenly, legs creaking, he rose. "I have it! We can't frighten our opponent and we can't persuade him that he no longer wants you. We must *force* him away from you."

"How?"

"The Devil thrives on passion, fury, hatred—all the emotions of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG.
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heat. His home and his being are the very essence of heat. In an atmosphere of frigidity he can't survive."

"You're suggesting a cruise to the Arctic? Remember, darling, I gave away my damn yacht."

"No, nothing that extensive. It so happens that we have an extra large deep-freeze in the kitchen —an extravagance which may indeed prove justifiable."

"I get into the deep-freeze?" Gloria Manfield's features registered disapproval.

"Yes, but please hurry." The doctor tottered a bit. "Mrs. Horn will be furious if we damage her floor any more."

The deep-freeze sat low and wide, shining with antiseptic whiteness. It was a fortress against heat, a silent miracle whose bowels were eternally cloaked in ice. Imagine—the exorcism of ancient evil by modern science. How unique!

The doctor crackled, "Help me get the meat and fruit out, and handle it swiftly, please."

They placed the frozen meat and fruit on the floor.

"Now, climb in."

Gloria Manfield hesitated. "How long do I stay in?"

"Not long, or the meat will thaw. Just a few minutes."

Slowly, Gloria Manfield lifted a shapely, firey leg and eased her body into the deep-freeze. At length she lay like a twisted, doubled-up girl in a magician's sword-box.

"Comfortable?" asked the doctor. "Or shall we take out the vegetables, too?

"Just relax. Let your head down on the celery. Ah, that's it. But will you try to keep your feet off the cauliflower? Fine. Ready? Here goes the door."

Ker-click.

Dr. Horn drummed his fingers on the top of the freeze. What would be a suitable time? Three minutes as in soft-boiling an egg? Possibly a little longer, he decided.

His nerves were disturbingly taut, as they inevitably were in times of crises. He toyed with the notion of brewing a cup of tea, then concluded he might relax more by transplanting a geranium plant or two. Whistling, he picked up his trowel and garden gloves from behind the stove and ambled outside. . . .

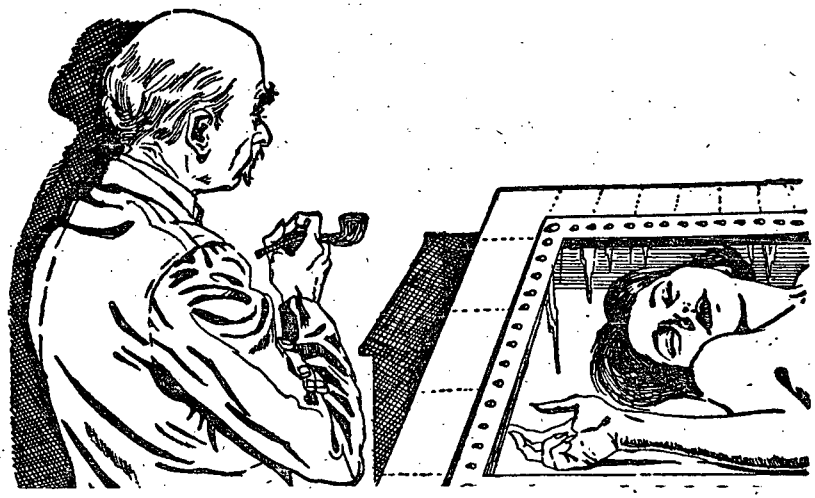
"Gabriel! What is our meat doing on the kitchen floor? Gabriel! Do you hear me?"

Fortunately, Dr. Horn's hearing aid was turned on. He rose creakingly from the geranium bed and shook dirt off his gloves. "Yes, quite neat, dear. It's looking neater every day."

"Meat, *meat,* MEAT, *MEAT!* I said *MEAT!*"

Goodness, thought the doctor. The woman looks distraught.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



He tiptoed out of the geraniums and tottered onto the back porch.

Mrs. Horn prodded him into the kitchen and pointed to the piles of meat and fruit. "*Explain,* Gabriel."

Dr. Horn scowled. "Why, I have no idea—"

Then, quick as a flash, it came to him. Loria Fanpeel!

"By Jove," he murmured. "Time passes so quickly in the geraniums."

Holding his breath, he raised the door of the deep-freeze.

"Miss Fanpeel," he called.

Gloria Manfield lay still and silent. If the icicles had been absent from her lips and nostrils, she would have looked like a life-sized statue carved in ice.

Dr. Horn cocked his head. "The fire is gone. Look, dear—"

"So is her soul. She's dead."

"Goodness, and I neglected to collect my fee."

Mrs. Horn, in a fit of sudden impatience, stomped her foot. Her eyes blazed. "Well, don't just stand there. Do you want the meat to spoil? What are you going to do with her?"

The good doctor sighed. "Put her with the yogi and Mr. Riddlemeyer and the invisible lizards, I suppose. Will you help me down the cellar steps with her?"

"Yes, I'll help you into the cellar with her, and I'll find you the shovel. After that, I'm going to pack. I've had enough of Californians. We're going back to New Hampshire!"

Dr. Horn thought for several seconds. "Yes, my dear," he said at length, "I believe we should."

THE END

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The flesh-strips were weak, but what remained of the spirit was willing: Until he realized how pitifully small, in Moderan, was . . .

A HUSBAND'S SHARE

By DAVID R. BUNCH

IT WAS in hopeful April that he stirred. The vapor shield had been turned off for that beautiful and rainy month, and when the sun shone bright on Moderan there was a touch of heaven in that iron and plastic place. A few true flowers, red and yellow and purple, peeped up at the edges of plastic yards; a sprinkling of grass sprigs lanced through at places of join and wear cracks in the gray surfacing of the yards and fields. How many other seedlets and bulbs and grass blades must have broken their heads against the steel-gray crust of Moderan, seeking to come to the sun!

Like a young man dreaming of his love, like a man of old going on carpets of peacock feathers and rose-pink scented air he came in his imagination across the slate-gray yard. But in reality it was *plunk plunt tap ta-rap tunk tunka tap* that his iron feet went on the plastic, and his silvered joints responded in their own way to the urgency of his need. For you see he was of the metaled folk of Moderan, the New Folk who hoped to live forever through "replacements."

He had started at sunrise on this bright Easter Sunday, had whistled the three sharp notes that opened the door of his house and had inched out jauntily, remembering a promise given at Xmas. By noon he was almost half to her, with hard walking. On down the yard he went through the hours of the after-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

noon, jaunty in his mind and hopeful as songs of birds, but shackled in movement to inch-along progress by the metal that had "replaced" him. "Maybe by Easter I can't walk," he remembered saying at Xmas. And she, his wife, had promised then to see him. At her place. To talk a bit at Easter. If Jon got through in time. Jon? Jon was her plastic man.

Sweat oozed up, from his great need, out of the urgency, out of the terrible exertion, to the flesh-strip on his face. Fatigue was coming in him, all the flesh of him, like a giant hand of lead slowly pulling him back and down. But his keen replaced eyes and the scientific detached brain noted clearly that he was making progress; the join cracks of his yard inexorably were inching by, or rather, he was passing across them in his bold struggle. If she ever would want me again, he thought, if she regularly wants me again, he thought, I'll have to have a Roll-go put in the yard. He wiped the flesh-strip of his face. I wonder if she can walk now, he mused, and then dismissed the thought. It had been years since he had seen her in any pose except reclining or sitting on her white plastic bed. He remembered her reclining. He recalled the deep richness of the nylo-wov gowns she wore, the dancing ever-changing sheen of them. He thought of her legs—"replaced" just enough and in just the places to bring them up to most-beautiful-legs-in-the-world standards. He remembered them in the rich sun-nylons, and how she would sit sometimes, coy legs dangled off bed edge, her small feet decorated with slippers of milky glass, the tall stemmy heels of which were clear, usually, glowing and shouting with diamonds. A tiny ball of pink or red feathers, expensively woven from plumage of some exotic bird kept from the Old Days, sometimes enhanced each slipper. If with straps, these were of new-gold mesh, either white or yellow or green gold.

He fought on down the yard until he came, very late in the afternoon, to a place beneath her bedroom window. He forced back the cold and clammy metal wish in him that made him want to flee across the yard, back the way he had come, back to his hip-snuggie chair and his thinking work, the formulas, the pleasant baffling precision of Universal Deep Problems. The hot wants of the flesh that was still his mastered the metal wish that was fast becoming his true cold preference, and he forced his very accurate eyes to go from looking at the gray yard up to pry into her window. The yel-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

low fear, the bitter taste of gold (his larynx had been worked in that against cancer) was rank in his throat as questions tattered the flesh of him to shreds of apprehension and doubt. Had Jon got through? Would she talk? Had she remembered?

Then he saw her! His very accurate eyes found her. He gripped the walls of the house with his metaled hands. She lay upon a white-lace coverlet upon her white bed. The full skirt of her white dress was arranged, fanned-out, in a perfect half-moon arc, just cutting across the centers of her knees, fabulous in dark nylons, with the tip of the half-moon centered precisely on either edge of the bed. She was fully dressed even to very tall-heeled glass slippers sparkling with many diamonds, and a little hat of green gold scales and chains slanted charmingly toward one blue eye. Her breasts were two round hills that came to summits, shape of berries, and the sheer valley between narrowed and widened, narrowed and widened, in a way to bring madness.

"Marblene!" he cried, "oh, Marblene!"

She stretched slowly, like some indolent new-metal cat. She turned her head when she was ready and gazed out the top half of the window, and across her face came a look of majestic and haughty boredom. And bewilderment. He called again.

"I'm here, Jon," she said. "Where are you, Jon? Oh hurry, Jon. It hurts worse than it has."

His hands slipped on the wall; he almost fell. All the sounds of metal were in his ears, and all the tastes of metal choked his throat. All the air seemed to burst in flame and had an acrid smell. He saw Jon. The tall plastic Jon came through her bedroom door, and he had a length of glass broomstick in his hands. It was warmed and perfumed and set with many gems. In his halting hinge-joint way the plastic one strutted about the room for awhile, rubbing and caressing the piece of glass broomstick and applying a warm liquid to it. Then carefully he was over her. He fumbled at fastenings. He worked a long time at fastenings in what looked like hot hurry. And, at the end of it all, Jon had removed her glass slippers. He fell to rubbing the soles of her feet then, violently, with the glass rod. After awhile, with her moaning in contentment, he arose and hurried into another room. He came back carrying eight small glass sticks which he promptly inserted between all her toes and then swayed back and forth in a gentle sawing motion with the

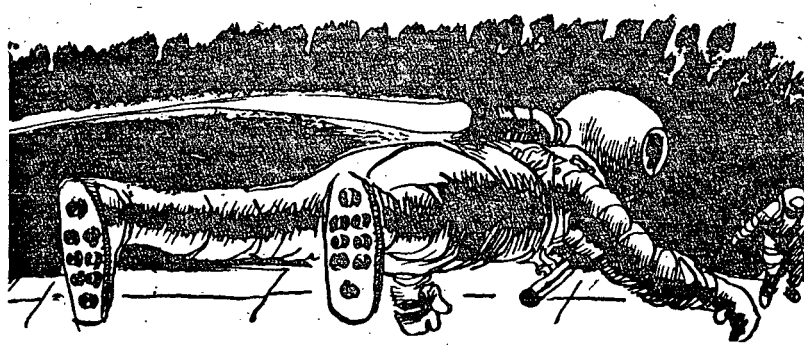
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sticks. "So much better, Jon," she murmured. "So good to me, Jon. So good for me, Jon. I'll probably sleep some in awhile."

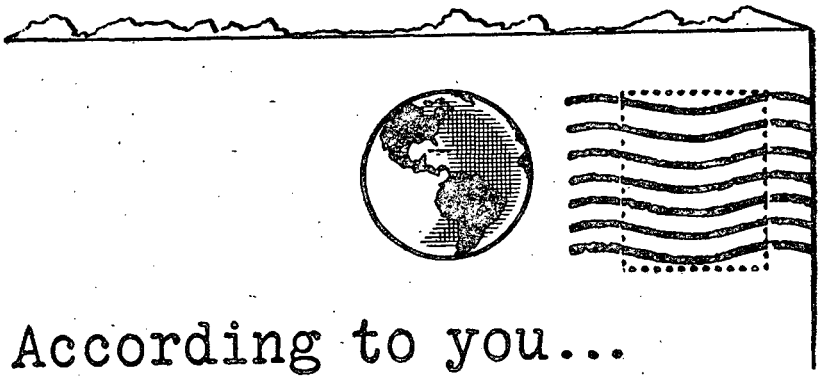
"MARBLENE!" he shouted then, all the frustrations of many months and this immediate jealousy of the plastic man welling up in him to bring this great yell. She turned her head a little to look out the lower half of the window, and Jon kept up the gentle motion at her toes. She saw him, her husband, hanging on to the wall, and there was no expression anywhere on her face to show that his being there meant one thing or another. "Jon's not through," she said. "He'll be activating at my toes a great while yet. Now that you've seen me for Easter, why don't you try again? At Halloween?"

He slipped and fell on down to the plastic yard. He crawled on around her house, and at the back, where she couldn't see him, he struggled to his feet. Then, *plunk plunt tap ta-rap tunk tunka tap,* he set off again across the steel-gray yard toward home, a pathetic figure of a little flesh and much of the new-metal new-alloy "replacements," destined, if the hopes and promises of Moderan were true, to live forever. About midnight a tin man in Seasons pressed the Central button for rain and a cold one started up to make more miserable the condition. Chilled and wet and throbbing with disappointment he reached his place in the very early hours of Monday morning. He went immediately to his hip-snuggie chair where his work awaited him, the formulas and the pleasant baffling precision of Universal Deep Problems. Somehow, oh, somehow, he must keep busy and make his flesh-strips forget her. At least until Halloween.

THE END



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



According to you...

Dear Editor:

In your editorial of the August 1960 issue of *Fantastic,* you asked if any of us had our personal Utopias, and if so what they were.

My dream world contains a small, lonely island located somewhere in the warm waters of the South Seas protected by some device which makes it undetectable by passing ships and planes. On this island, there would be facilities for me and a group of my closest friends. There would of course be comfortable living quarters, a well stocked pantry, sufficient recreation space, modern Physics and chemistry labs, and a good machine shop. The labs would naturally be equipped to handle experiments in the realm of nuclear physics and related fields. In addition to all this, there would also be, based on this island, a vehicle capable of leaving the earth and voyaging to the distant stars using some means that bypasses the speed limit discovered by Dr. Einstein. This ship would be capable of remaining away from the island base as long as we felt necessary to finish what we were doing on whatever alien world we were on. We would return to Terra whenever we began to get a little homesick for the green hills of earth.

Probably many people would not care for my Utopia as there is too much work to do in it and you would not be waited on hand and foot, but I like it and that's all that's necessary.

Richard H. Blumhagen
1204 Trinity Avenue
Schenectady 6, N. Y.

If a lot of folks liked your Utopia, it might not be Utopia any more.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dear Editor:

The fabulous July issue of *Fantastic* has achieved one thing if not many for you—that issue alone gives you my vote for the "Hugo" award for the best magazine of 1960. I don't think any other publication in the field is/will be able to match the magnificent quality of not only that issue, but *Fantastic* as a whole this year.

The story robin was a classic first in the modern science fiction field and I would certainly like to see another of the same type. Each of the authors took his cue and followed suit in a manner that produced a breathtaking and original idea to the theory of Time which has been hacked to pieces far too often in the genre.

As if that wasn't enough you had to put in another of Sam Moskowitz's highly interesting articles on the greats of the field. I am decidedly pleased to see the continuation of this series which began in the now defunct *Satellite* if I remember correctly. I also feel that it is only fitting that the article on "The Father of the sf Magazine", Hugo Gernsback, be featured in *Amazing* the magazine he started rather than in this magazine. I am the proud owner of three of those large size magazines produced by Mr. Gernsback and I can't look through them without feeling some small bit of reverence to the man who paved the way for the modern Ziff-Davis publications and all other science fiction magazines.

Finally two more commendations which must not be omitted are the new serial by Jack Sharkey and the extra long letter section. The former has captivated my interest to the point of unbearable anxiety for part two. It is written in the delightfully eminent style of Sharkey who is undoubtedly the best new writer in the past two years. The latter is raising public opinion of your publications far more than you can imagine. Being centered in the feverish world of the active fan, I can well vouch for and verify that last statement.

It looks as if we are witness to the dawning of a new era in Ziff-Davis science fiction. An era that has not been witnessed since Ray Palmer left the editor's chair nearly a decade ago.

Billy Joe Plott
P.O. Box 654
Opelika, Alabama

● *Well, gee! Of course the trouble with running one story like "The Covenant" is that everyone wants more like it. So do we. But they are hard to come by. Incidentally, about this Hugo: how many more votes do we need?*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dear Editor:

I would like to make a comment or two on the round robin novelet in the July issue of *Fantastic.* Frankly, it stank. I must admit that while I do prefer sf to fantasy, I am still fond of good fantasy. Note the word "good". I do not consider "The Covenant" good fantasy. In fact, I don't consider it good anything. But we all have different tastes, so what can you do? It was though, a good study of the varied styles of the five authors, so it wasn't a total loss.

I have completed reading the first part of Jack Sharkey's "The Crispin Affair" and I anxiously await your August issue to read the conclusion. One thing rather puzzles me and that is the nonchalant way the principal characters go flitting off to Andromeda in a mere two weeks or so. Heck, we'll be lucky if man can make it to Mars by 1983. Yet here we are, in 1983, ripping about at mind-staggering multiples of light speed. Pretty good, man. We should be so lucky.

As for the other stories in the same issue, I found them very enjoyable and in the case of "Special Report", not a little chilling.

What do you people think of the efforts of television in delving into science-fiction? I refer to "The Twilight Zone" and "Men Into Space." I can't complain too much about "Twilight Zone", save that they seem to tend to be a little mystic, however I never fail to break up while watching "Men Into Space". If it isn't some jarhead tearing about in the process of going psychotic over escaping air, it's some intrepid "spaceman" building something or other on the moon, and making the scenery acoustically similar to a boiler factory. Which is a pretty neat trick on so airless a body as our Moon. Well, they tell me Hollywood can do most anything. Yes, we've come a long way from Flash Gordon. Yeah, *sure* we have.

Anthony Ryan
2024 Bristol Ave.
Stockton, Calif.

● *Perhaps "The Covenant" wasn't fantasy in your opinion but if getting to Andromeda in two weeks isn't fantasy then I don't know what you want. As for TV and sf we have only one comment —Fantastic!*

Dear Editor:

From the usually unreliable vantage point of the contents page it looked as if *Fantastic* for July was going to be one of the all

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

time great magazines along with that March '59 (or was it '58) *Amazing*. To my surprise the impression remained when I finished reading. The layout was perfect; one novelet, two short stories, a serial chapter, an article, and a moderate number of features. Don't change this unless something special comes up. Then there was a gimick story with a lineup of well-known authors to keep it from being just another good issue. And an editorial dealing with the mag. And an interesting letter column, plus a good cover and interior illos. But why go on listing your virtues. Suffice it to say that I don't have a single complaint . . . except (you may mutter, "I knew it" to yourself here if you like) I must confess I am a little doubtful about Jack Sharkey's science. Nothing in particular you understand, just that if that space ship drive would work, why isn't it already developed? It would be easy to make one. Yet it sounds almost logical. Either he has got something there or he is a master of double talk. I wonder if he bought stock in a copper mine before printing the story.

Come to think of it your magazines have had quite a lot of science in them lately, and in the fictional form in which it belongs. You can get some real ideas from them. For example, if the concept of "The Covenant" holds true, then we are held up in time by some sort of ramp that is under no obligation to remain at a constant slope. That could explain the old ages in the Bible. We could be going back to that as the "ramp" levels out again. Or it might drop at any moment. But isn't that confusing the effects of time with time itself? Aging is a chemical process not a temporal one. It just takes time to happen. I'm beginning to think that the covenant is just a lot of entertaining but meaningless words. And then again if time isn't . . . Agh! so what!

Frederick Norwood
111 Upperline
Franklin, Louisiana

● *It's nice to fool a reader once in a while and prove that you can tell a book by its cover—or its table of contents.*

The following letters represent further comments on "The Covenant":

Dear Editor:

Congratulations! *Fantastic* is to be commended for publishing the novelet "The Covenant". This was an example of the fine workmanship one can expect from reading *Fantastic*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I, being an avid reader of all science fiction, really flipped when I read this story. The idea of having five top sf writers create a great story such as this is "fantastic!"

James Turner
Canton Street
Warners, N. Y.

Dear Editor:

When I first got my June issue of *Fantastic*, and saw the "Coming Next Month" feature, needless to say, I expected an excellent job in the July issue. The cover was good and, since I have read a fair amount by each of the authors of the 'round-robin novelet and by Sharkey, my hopes were higher than usual. And when I finally did get it, I found my hopes easily surpassed; I deem this issue the best since . . . I can't remember when.

And, for a change, your short stories were good, too.

I immediately decided, after the first few pages, that Jack Sharkey's "The Crispin Affair" was an A-1 novel, and I am looking forward to the conclusion in your next issue, which, by the way, also looks very promising. I have recently noticed your interest in serials; I'm all for it, and I'd like to see much more of them in the future, both in *Amazing* and *Fantastic*.

Also excellent was your idea of adding sixteen extra pages. I (and I'm sure many other readers agree with me) would like to see *Fantastic* keep the extra sixteen, and become a regular 146 page mag like your sister, *Amazing*.

And now, the novelet. I've never read anything quite like it before. It continually amazed me to see the way one author passed the story on to the next. It was a real fantasy, and that's what I, and many other readers, want from *Fantastic*. It did you a real honor; how about more like it in the future?

Bob Adolfsen
9 Prospect Avenue
Sea Cliff, New York

Dear Editor:

I find it impossible to hold back my compliments on the July issue of *Fantastic:* by far, the most outstanding, excellent, and admirable issued thus far.

The 'round-robin novelet was a unique blend of talent, meeting every standard of quality that I had surmised it would. It was of an

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

off-beat nature of entertainment, and the first of its kind that I have had the pleasure to read. Robert Bloch should be commended for his remarkable job of tying the story ends together. It was a masterpiece of science fiction (if that is what you could call it) literature.

Next, Jack Sharkey's serial: I can only say one thing about it—it'll do (though not up to par with his short stories).

The rest of the magazine, with one exception, was excellent. The exception I refer to is "There's Always A Way". I hope that I never see a story of such poor quality as this one in *Fantastic* or *Amazing* in the future.

Spencer Carlsen
1119 Morrison St.
No. Hollywood, Calif.

Dear Editor:

Concerning your May 1960 issue of *Fantastic*, I can only say that it is the finest I have seen for many years. I am not trying to give the impression that I just love the magazine; on the contrary, sometimes I become so dismayed at the quality of it, that I even consider not buying it, but I usually get over it. About those biographies, I think that it's a superb idea, and here are some suggestions: Asimov, Leiber, Heinlein, Van Vogt, and others who always give such good reading.

Alexander Yudenitch
Rua Caetano Pinto, 2F2-Apt. 402
Sao Paulo, S.P.-Brasil.

● *A very good idea, to profile current top sf writers, and one whose possibilities we will investigate.*

Dear Editor:

Congratulations on Sam Moskowitz's series of articles. The one on Shiel is very good and amazing. I had no idea of what the man was really like as I had read only "The Purple Cloud." However, it is surprising to me that the best part of *Fantastic* is the article by Sam. I had the rather nebulous impression, perhaps false, that *Fantastic* was a fiction magazine? I will continue to buy it on the basis of the excellent non-fiction.

Thomas S. Gardner
155 Jackson Avenue
Rutherford, N.J.

● *If we don't please you one way, we aim to please you in another.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dear Editor:

Just finished the August issue of *Fantastic*. Best story this time around, I think, was Eric Frank Russell's "This One's on Me." Russell's plots are not really different from those used by many other sf authors, but the method he uses to advance his plots is very different. The weapon he uses is his exceptionally humorous dialog. This serves to bring up a point. Just where is humor in sf and fantasy today? It seems that all one can find in today's mags is tight adventure and involved plots. Not that I have anything against good adventure stories, but I would like to have, every once in a while at least, a good comedy after the main feature. I am quite sure that most everyone who reads your magazine, and many other magazines, gets tired of suffering through one man's trouble until he solves them, or fails to, as the case might be, only to turn the page and wade through another's even more depresssing ones. I don't think that there is anyone who has read such novels as "Martians Go Home," by Fredric Brown or "The Door Into Summer," by Robert A. Heinlein, who can say that this type of sf or fantasy isn't a relief.

Harry Thomas
Brookside
Sweetwater, Tenn.

● *Every editor—sf or general—would give his editorial eyeteeth for really good humor. It is hard to get. Only a few writers—Jack Sharkey, for instance—produce any. And if you think you suffer reading adventure after adventure with no comic relief, how about the poor staffer who does it all day every day!*

Dear Editor:

The August Fantastic was the first one I received on my subscription, and I was not sorry I subscribed.

"The World-Timer" was both entertaining and thought-provoking, a good combination. As a sample of Bloch humor, it was superb—the puns were especially witty. The various alternate worlds were gems. As a story it carried suspense but I was a little disappointed in the ending, as I had half expected retribution for the two principals after they had been forced into murdering the other man, setting them up for some sardonic justice in the Bloch manner. The chunks of solid philosophizing were excellent, even though they presumably slowed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

up the action; not that I objected. I think ideas are what science fiction is *for*—the entertainment is essential but in second place.

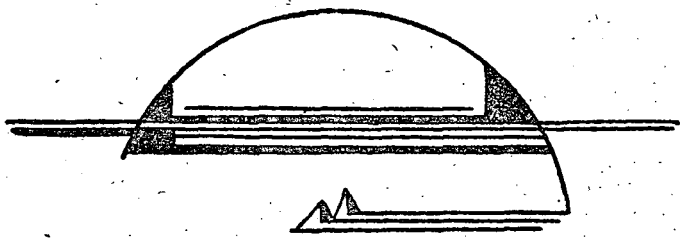
"Rats of Limbo" Fritz Leiber's short-short, was quaint. I thought the changes in the dream were going to predict actual happenings in the real world—such as the disappearance of the crumb meaning a change in the woman's name due to marriage, but the ending was completely wacky.

I have the feeling, shared by many other fans, that *Amazing* and *Fantastic* have recently become "our" magazines—catering to the steady reader and the enthusiastic fan, rather than to the casual buyer and "don't care" crowd. There is concrete evidence for it in the stories by such "fans' pros" as Bloch, Leiber, Russell, and the Moskowitz articles. If you go any more "fannish," you may fold completely, if one is to believe in the jinx on fan-slanted magazines.

Before you do fold, however, I wish you would run a very brief fan column, a page or so mentioning a few of the current fan magazines published. The problem is getting science fiction readers acquainted with fanzines in the first place, and how are you going to have a "fanzine fandom" filled with genuine science fiction fans if you don't recruit them *through* science fiction?

Donald Franson,
6543 Babcock Avenue
North Hollywood, Calif.

● *We have enough trouble without being jinxed. Anyway, if we are now "your" magazines, why are you giving us the fanzine "evil eye"?*



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SHOPPING GUIDE
Classified

Rate: 25¢ per word including name and address. Minimum 10 words. Send orders and remittance to FANTASTIC, One Park Avenue, New York City 16, New York. Attention Martin Lincoln.

BOOKS—MAGAZINES

FANTASY & SF Books & Mags lowest prices, list free. Werewolf Bookshop, 7055M Shannon Road, Verona, Pa.

BOOKS, Pocketbooks, magazines. Tremendous stock, reasonable prices. Lists on request. Science-Fiction and Fantasy Publications, 78-04 Jamaica Avenue, Woodhaven 21, N. Y.

SPECIALISTS: Science-Fiction, Fantasy, Weird Fiction Books, pocketbooks, magazines. Lists issued. Stephen's Book Service, 71 Third Avenue, New York 3, N. Y.

SCIENCE Fiction Fantasy books, magazines at clearance prices. List free. Reedmor Magazine, 607 Market Street, Philadelphia 6, Pa.

SF MAGS, Books—Free Lists. Held, 1152 Kensington, Buffalo 15, N. Y.

BACK Issues "Amazing," "Fantastic," other mags. Also books. Free catalog. Gerry de la Ree, 277 Howland, River Edge, N. J.

HYPNOTISM

"QUICK As a Flash" Self Hypnosis Amazing Techniques! Guaranteed Results $1.00 Postpaid. Morton Greene, 905 Carmen, Chicago, Ill.

1,000 YEARS Ahead! Thoughtforming Manual, $2. Thoughtforming Brief, $1 Postpaid, guaranteed. *Sensitron System*, Box 1126, St. Augustine, Fla.

HYPNOTIZE Using pocket-size "Hypno-Coin." Has plastic lens that whirls when vibrated. Complete with instructions, revealing secrets—only $1.00 ppd. Free catalog included. Must work or money back. Hypnotic Aids, Dept. C-47, 1133 Broadway, New York City 10.

LEARN While Asleep, Hypnotize with your recorder, phonograph. Astonishing details, unusual catalog free! Sleep-Learning Association, Box 24-ZD, Olympia, Washington.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

COMPLETE Your High School at home in spare time with 63-year-old school. Texts furnished. No classes. Diploma. Information booklet free. American School, Dept. 736, Drexel at 58th, Chicago 37, Illinois.

FORTUNES Made by Prospectors. Our Home Study Course teaches you to recognize valuable mineral deposits. Free details. Write: Modern Prospector, Box 643, Cheyenne, Wyoming.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

MAKE $25-$50 week, clipping newspaper items for publishers. Some clippings worth $5.00 each. Particulars free. National, 81-DG, Knickerbocker Station, New York.

EARN Extra money selling advertising book matches. Free sample furnished. Matchcorp, Dept. MD-100, Chicago 32, Ill.

HELP WANTED

MERCHANT Marine jobs. Men and women. Top wages. Travel. Details 10¢. Captain, Box 501-AF, Reading, Massachusetts.

RUN A spare-time Greeting Card and Gift Shop at home. Show friends samples of our new 1960 Christmas and All-Occasion Greeting Cards and Gifts. Take their orders and *earn to 100% profit*. No experience necessary. Costs nothing to try. Write today for samples on approval. Regal Greetings, Dept. 148, Ferndale, Michigan.

AUTHORS

ATTENTION All Writers! Authorship means prestige! Your short stories, articles, books, plays, will receive our prompt sales handling! Write immediately for free literature! Literary Agent Mead, 915 Broadway, N. Y. C. 10.

BINOCULARS & TELESCOPES

OPTICAL — Science — Math Bargains — Request Free Giant Catalog "CJ"—128 pages—Astronomical Telescopes, Microscopes, Lenses, Binoculars, Kits, Parts. Amazing War Surplus bargains. Edmund Scientific Co., Barrington, N. J.

TAPES—RECORDERS

TAPE Recorders, Hi-Fi Components, Sleep-Learning Equipment, Tapes, Unusual Values. Free Catalog. Dressner, 69-02 FT, 174 St., Flushing 65, N. Y.

DETECTIVES

DETECTIVES—Experience unnecessary. Detective Particulars. Wagoner, 125-Z West 86th Street, New York.

COLOR PHOTO FINISHING

GUARANTEED Quality processing, 35mm, 8mm Kodachrome $1.00. Send for free mailers, photographic discount catalogue. Carterchrome, Box 645, Utica 1, New York.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

OLD-MONEY WANTED

$500,000,000 SEARCH For Rare Coins. Up to $35,000 paid for rare dates. Hundreds of coins worth $10 to $35,000. Estimated $500,000,000 in rare coins in circulation. Certain dates worth: Half cents before 1858, $3,500; Large pennies before 1858, $5,000; Flying eagle pennies before 1859, $600; Indian pennies before 1910, $1,750; Lincoln pennies before 1932, $225; Two-cent pieces, $1,000; Nickels before 1927, $15,000; Dimes before 1932, $5,100; Twenty-cent pieces $3500; Quarters before 1934, $5,000; Half-dollars before 1939, $4,250; Silver dollars before 1936, $12,500; Gold coins before 1934, $35,000 (all dates gold coins rare). Canadian coins before 1937, $2,500. Send $1 for catalog of rare U. S. coins giving information and prices we pay. Our 1960 edition just off press. Mintage figures of U. S. coins included. Also, information on gold coins, Canadian coins and paper money. Confederate paper money, U. S. paper money, tokens, etc. Your dollar refunded when you sell us coins. Sell to one of America's largest dealers. Compare our prices with any coin catalog. Thousands of satisfied customers. Reliability guaranteed. Send $1 for what many call "the finest coin catalog available." Endwell-Union Co., Endwell S22A, N. Y.

MUSIC

SONGS Into Dollars! Share 33 million dollars yearly for New Songwriters, Songpoets. Any subject, songs composed. Published, Promoted by largest firm. Information, appraisal Free. Send Nordyke Music Publishers, 6000 Sunset, Hollywood 283, California.

PERSONALS

YOUR Handwriting reveals 100 classified character-traits—fascinating reliable self-knowledge. Send page sample and $2.00 for individualized graded Personality Chart. Estelle Ries, handwriting psychologist, "CGAP," 533 West 112, New York.

LOANS By Mail—$50 to $600 for any purpose. Employed men, women eligible. Confidential. 2 years to repay. Write for free loan application. American Loan Plan, City National Bldg., Dept. ZD-89220, Omaha 2, Neb.

MISCELLANEOUS

DIESEL Injector Parts and Fuel Pumps Wanted. GM51—53—71—110 Frank, 2093 East 19 Street, Cleveland 15, Ohio.

BIZARRE Fashions! Illustrated Catalogue, $1.00. Rene, Box 2804-P, Hollywood 28, Calif.

SKYSCRAPER-Heel Shoes, Wasp-waisted Corsets! Photo Catalogs, $2.00. Finecraft, Box 442-P, Hollywood 28, Calif.

KEY Chains, personalized ashtrays, smoke sets —useful novelties for home, office and gifts. Inexpensive items. Send 10¢ for illustrated brochure. House of Brand, FA-4, 3458 Fish Avenue, New York 69, New York.

CHEMI-Lite and water produces "cold light." Twenty grams for 20¢. Theodore Winkel, East Street, Madison, Indiana.

1000 NAME and Address Labels in plastic box 88¢. Three-line personalized rubber pocket stamp 88¢. Satisfaction guaranteed. Jordan's, 552 West O'Connor, Lima, Ohio.

We are growing . . .

and you can grow with us by placing a small classified ad in the classified columns of Fantastic.

For as little as $2.50 (25¢ per word; 10-word minimum) your classified message will be read by more than 50,000 active buyers each month.

Test them today! You'll be delighted with the results!
For complete details, write:

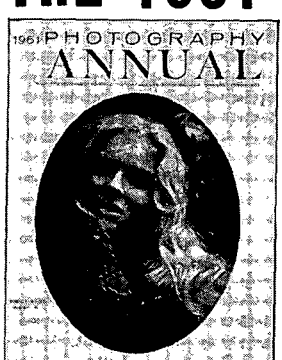
Martin Lincoln, Classified Advertising Manager
FANTASTIC
One Park Avenue
New York 16, New York

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pablo Picasso by Irving Penn

WATCH FOR

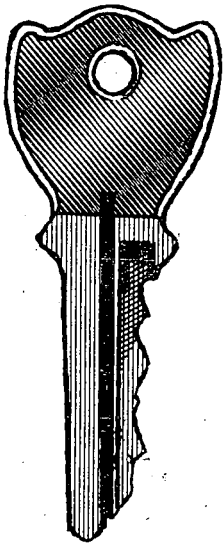
THE 1961 PHOTOGRAPHY ANNUAL



WORLD'S GREATEST SHOWCASE OF FINE PHOTOGRAPHS! ON SALE AT NEWSSTANDS AND CAMERA STORES EVERYWHERE AUGUST 25th.

ONLY $1.25

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



If
ELECTRONICS is your field...

HERE'S THE KEY THAT WILL OPEN THE DOOR!

the 1961 edition of

JOBS AND CAREERS IN ELECTRONICS

It's the world's most comprehensive guide to choosing a career in ELECTRONICS—the field of the future!

Five Giant Sections:

- Opportunities Now Available
- On-the-Job Descriptions of Electronics Careers
- Planning Your Career—Schools, Courses, Military
- Testing Your Electronics Aptitudes
- Spare-Time Electronics

BUY YOUR COPY AT YOUR FAVORITE NEWSSTAND OR ELECTRONICS PARTS STORE—

ON SALE SEPTEMBER 6th! ONLY $1.00

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED